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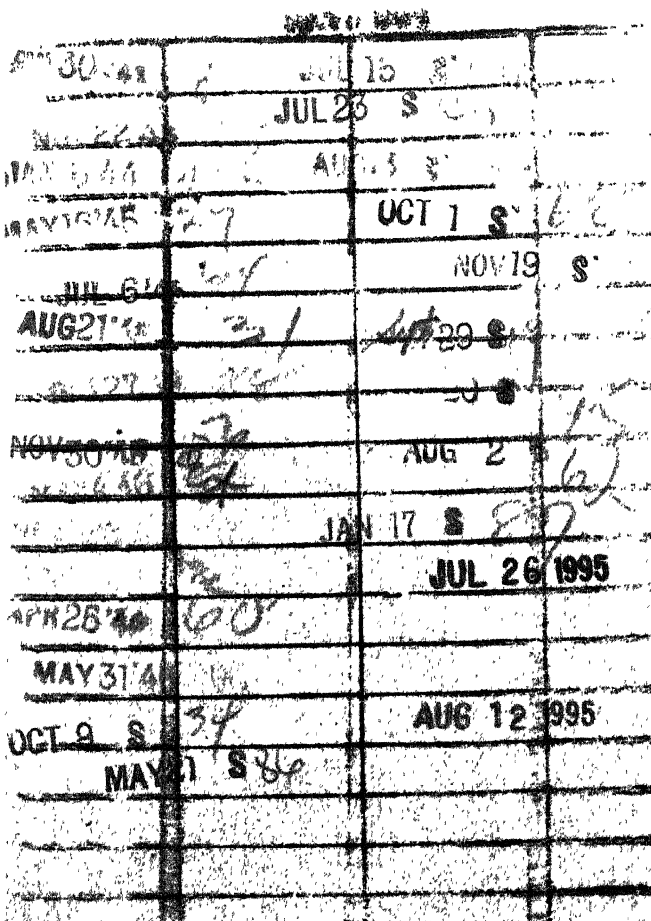
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TWO ALONE

BY

Phillip Jaron

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF

Horace Stafford



19

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JEDEN

I LET GO OF MY FATHER'S HAND AND KISSED my mother, and when I patted my little brother on the head he hit me on the leg with his fist. I gave him a push and pretended I was going to fight him, but the train began moving and I had to get on. They waved at me when I looked out at them over the heads of my comrades who were leaning out of the windows. When the movement of the train cut them out of my sight, I left the window and sat down on one of the benches.

Josef came over and sat down beside me. I took my pack off and shoved it under the bench.

'We are on our way,' he said.

'At last,' I replied.

'I don't really feel like talking,' he said.

'Neither do I.'

'But I want to hear you talk,' he continued.

'I can't think of anything to say.'

'I didn't sleep much last night,' Josef remarked.

'I had bad dreams too.'

'What did you dream about?'

'I was trying to fish in the river, and every time I pulled one up, it was a Bolshevik.'

'What did you do with them?'

'I would hand them over to you.'

'What did I do with them?'

'You were eating them.'

'Alive?'

'Yes.'

'Give me a cigarette. I want to get the taste out of my mouth.'

The train gathered speed. I watched the last houses of Kalisz flash past the windows. Already the feverish excitement of leaving was being dulled by the prospect of the long journey across Poland. We rolled through town after town, finally passing through Warsaw. After that we traveled two days and nights, stopping only to eat and put coal and water in the engine.

We were dirty and sleepy, and tired of being cooped up together in the cramped quarters of a fourth-class passenger car. At last we left the train at a small depot and marched into Zambrovo, where we were assigned to bunks in a large *koszary*.

The next morning at breakfast we learned that we were going to the front. At Szerwony Bór, which was a railroad junction about a half-day's march to the north, we were to take the train that would carry us within marching distance of the front.

We formed our column along the road in front of the *koszary* and marched out of Zambrovo, following a narrow dusty road through a dense forest. I lit the butt of

the cigarette I had saved for after breakfast. It was my last bit of tobacco. The whole company was short of cigarettes. We had not been able to buy tobacco after we left Warsaw.

Josef was marching at my side. 'Wladek,' he said.

'What is it, my friend?' I already knew what he wanted.

'Will you do me a favor?'

'A big favor, or a little favor?'

'Just a small thing,' he said.

'And what is that?'

'Lend me a cigarette. I couldn't buy any in Zambrovo. They were out of tobacco.'

'I will tell you what I will do,' I offered.

His big red face lit up. 'What is that?'

'I will blow some smoke your way.'

'Is that the way you treat your friends?'

'I gave you two puffs at breakfast.'

'A taste,' he answered. 'Just one puff, Wladek. My life is yours for just one puff.'

We came to a fork in the road, and the column was brought to a halt. We fell out among the trees on the side of the road to rest. Beyond the other side of the road about a hundred yards was a farmhouse. We could see where the farmer had cleared away the forest and made his fields.

Josef was sitting beside me expectantly. I blew some smoke his way. Just then Captain Orlinski came up and sat down close by. He motioned for me to come over to him.

'Stanislow,' he said.

I handed the butt to Josef. 'Hold that for me,' I commanded.

I went up to the Captain. He was a good officer, being well liked by everyone because of the consideration he always showed for his men.

'Go and see if the farmer has tobacco,' he ordered.

I saluted smartly, and as I turned away I winked at Josef. Watch the fun, eh? I shouldered my rifle and marched across the road. As I walked up to the house some dogs began making a racket, and the farmer came running from behind his house. He stopped short when he saw me. I walked up to him frowning and scowling, with my lips stuck out. He was frightened; a farmer is always afraid of a soldier: a soldier always wants something.

He was afraid to speak, but I could see the question in his eyes: What do you want?

'I want tobacco,' I growled out.

'But I have no tobacco,' he declared, and his eyes were searching mine to see what I would do next.

I wanted to be sure he didn't have it, so I brought my rifle off my shoulder.

'I'll give you five minutes to bring tobacco.' I pointed my gun at him.

The farmer pulled his cap off and fell down on his knees. Tears came in his eyes and he folded his hands in front of his face. 'No, please!' he cried. 'I have had no tobacco for a long time; it's impossible! You would not kill your own countryman?'

He was truly terrified. His wife was standing in the door wringing her hands.

'I will not harm you if you give me tobacco.'

'No, no. We have no tobacco!' they cried. 'We have had none for a long time!'

I thought they would shake to pieces. It was hard for me to keep on frowning. But I could see they were telling the truth.

'All right,' I said, 'but let that be a lesson to you. Next time have tobacco when a soldier asks you!'

I glared at them for a second more, and then marched back to the grinning faces of my comrades.

'The farmer has no tobacco,' I reported to the Captain.

'Perhaps we can get it at the junction,' he replied, and he formed us in line again.

When we arrived at Szerwony Bór it was well past noon. We ate the bread and coffee that had been rationed to each of us at Zambrovo. But here we could find no cigarettes either. Smoking-tobacco is important to an army; it keeps a soldier happy, or, as happy as a soldier should be. The stationmaster suggested that we might find some in the village of Godsz, about two miles away.

'We have three hours to wait for the train,' Captain Orlinski told me. He put some money in my hand. 'Go to the village and bring some tobacco. But hurry back,' he said.

My belly was full; it was easy walking without my rifle and pack. In no time at all I could see a cluster of small white houses. I came to a small bridge that crossed over a fresh running creek which seemed to circle

around one side of the village. I stopped and got a drink.

There were no more than a half-hundred houses in the whole village. I located the store and walked in. A woman stood behind the counter. I noticed some candy and candles and a pair of scales.

'I want to buy some tobacco,' I said.

'We do not have any tobacco here,' the woman answered.

'There's no use trying to scare you,' I thought. 'You would sell it if you had it.'

'Do you know where I can get any?'

'No. There is none in the village.'

'Jesus, no tobacco anywhere!'

She nodded her head. 'The country is in an uproar; a sad state of affairs!'

I made up my mind: If I can't get tobacco I'll get something else, some boiled eggs and butter and cheese.

'I'll buy some eggs, butter, and cheese,' I said.

'We don't sell that here. You are hard to get along with,' she responded jokingly.

'Where can I get it?'

'Here, I'll show you,' she said, and she took me outside. 'Go straight down the road, take the first turn to the right, and it's the first long white house you see.'

I thanked her and started off at a good pace. I needed to hurry if I didn't want to get left at the depot. Turning the corner, I located the house standing a little way off the road. As I came closer I saw someone near the house sitting with her back to me on what seemed to be the bank of a stream, and as I drew near I could tell it was a

dziewezinka, a girl, because of the long blonde hair falling loosely down her back. It was pretty golden hair.

I trod on the grass so as to make no noise, and when I got near enough to touch her I shouted, 'Boo!'

She jumped up and turned around, wide-eyed with fright for a second, and then she smiled. When she smiled something happened inside of me. I felt like shouting, but I was speechless. After the fright had left her eyes they were still wide and innocent, and they seemed to be speaking to me. The things they were saying were the most important and pleasant things in the world. This must be how angels talk. She was beautiful, although she was barefooted. I forgot about the army, the Bolsheviks, the tobacco; I couldn't have told my name. There was no such thing as a train in existence. The only thing I was aware of in the world was this girl. Nothing existed except us, and I resolved on the instant that I would never leave her.

Suddenly I became aware of some sort of disturbance: she had turned her head slightly toward the house. I listened and heard someone calling, 'Sonia, Sonia, where are you?'

'That's your name,' I stated, as though I had discovered a miraculous secret. Somehow her name had formed a beautiful meaning in my head, and set my heart thumping violently against my chest.

'Yes,' she said, and when I heard her voice I was surprised that she could speak, because I had found out so much from the silent message of her eyes. My heart stung with the pleasure of the moment.

Just then a small middle-aged woman came out of the house, and when she saw me she cried, 'Sonia, come into the house at once!'

Right away I knew it was her mother; but the girl did not move until the woman came up and stood before me in front of her, and then she moved away from behind her.

'Go into the house this minute, Sonia!' she repeated, and gave her a push.

I had time to collect my wits.

The woman looked at me suspiciously. She had a manner like that of a hen protecting her young. Mothers have a natural ability for that.

She spoke up sharply, 'What are you looking for?'

My mind was made up. I was determined somehow to get a settlement about myself and this girl. Her mother can love her no more than I do. I stopped myself, startled. I had never looked at a girl before. What had happened to me? I didn't know it was such a serious thing! I looked to see where she was: she was just entering the house. I saw her look back as she went in.

I said: 'I am a soldier on three days' furlough. I am from a large city. This village is peaceful and quiet; it's like heaven to me. Would it be possible for you to let me stay the three days in your house? I will pay you well.'

'No,' she replied instantly. 'We have no place for you.'

At this time a stocky gray-haired man approached

from one side of the house: her father, I supposed. He looked like a good-natured sort of fellow.

‘What is all the commotion about? What is the trouble?’

I told him what I had told her mother. He looked me over, eyeing me up and down. Then he said: ‘Why, yes, Regina, we have a spare room. He can stay his three days with us. He is fighting for our country, you know.’

The housewife was embarrassed, but I hastened to smile at her, to show that I held no ill will toward her. I beamed on the husband and shook his hand warmly.

‘You are very kind people.’

We walked toward the house. ‘You must tell me news of the things that are happening to our country. My name is Zigmont Markow.’

‘This is my pleasure, *Pan* Markow. I am Wladek Stanislow, as you see, a soldier of the ranks’; and we shook hands again.

‘You must excuse *Pani* Markow; she does not become acquainted very easily,’ he stated.

‘Certainly,’ I assured him. ‘She is a fine woman.’ I was thinking of someone else at the same time.

It was well toward evening by this time, and after they showed me to my room I lay down to compose myself to the thing I had done. My conscience told my head what a fool I was, leaving my comrades, deserting the army, forgetting my sacred duty to Poland. Even the children would spit on me. But my heart spoke to my head also: this man loves his country, would die for

it; but he loves this girl too. He would die for her just as easily. This thought gave me courage.

Pan Markow called me to supper, and I talked with them about the war and the things happening to our country, but most of the time my eyes were on Sonia. After supper she was sent to bed, and there was nothing for me to do but wait till the next day.

I awoke and found my uniform mended in the places where it was torn. I could think of only one person who would do such a thing for me. My heart was bounding. In the kitchen I asked *Pani* Markow who had mended my clothes, and just then Sonia came through the door.

'It was you who mended my uniform,' I stated.

She nodded her head, blushing, and in the confusion of the moment — I could not help myself — I stepped up and kissed her on the forehead.

Sonia was smiling, and I thought my heart would explode, but her mother was frowning. The time had come for me to state my case, to tell the mother of my feelings toward her daughter.

'Forgive me,' I apologized, 'but I couldn't help it. I am away from home. There is no one to mend my clothes for me. This thing made me very happy.' And then I continued: 'I am a stranger to you. You do not know me; perhaps you distrust me because of this, but I assure you that I am an honest man. I have no evil intentions toward your daughter. I would protect her honor with my life, and I must confess that I love her. I ask you to believe me. I ask you to trust me. That is

all I ask.' I stopped to listen to what she was about to say.

'Young man,' she said, 'you have not yet been in my house twenty-four hours, and yet you ask for my daughter's hand. Tomorrow, you have said, you will go away. What is my daughter to do then?'

'She will wait for me to come back.'

'You may be killed.'

'No. I will come back.'

We continued to talk, but I seemed unable to convince her of my sincerity, or, at least, she was unwilling to allow herself to be convinced. I decided to retreat and await a more favorable occasion, and passed the rest of the day between the wife in the kitchen and the husband in the field, lending a hand here and there, trying to make myself agreeable, getting in a word now and then concerning Sonia and myself. I could see that I was making more headway with *Pan* Markow; he had agreed to let me walk through the village and back with Sonia, and after much pleading, her mother allowed us this pleasure upon our promise to be back in time for supper.

We walked along the road that had brought me to her house. I had so much to say, yet I could find no words with which to say it. As we passed each house we were aware of the people staring at us, the bold ones leaning over the fence, making faces at each other and gesturing at us with their heads as if to say, 'Look, Sonia's going with a soldier!' And the young *dziewczynkas* of the village pulled enviously at the ends of their *busteczka*s which came over their heads, tightly surrounding their excited

faces, and fastened under their wagging chins. 'Tak, tak. Yes, yes, look at Sonia!'

The thought of the villagers watching us, and the high extent of our feeling for each other, made us unable to talk. We passed the village store, and I would have stopped to buy some candy, but Sonia read my thought and increased her pace, her face already red from the gaping and whispering gossipers. I wanted to tell Sonia of my parents. I had gone away without leaving a sweet-heart to keep them cheerful about my return. I looked at Sonia proudly. And what would they say now!

Although she had not yet reached seventeen, she was almost my size, and she could carry water on her shoulders like a man. But with all that, she was comely and innocent as a dove. How well she looked with the little fluff of golden hair peeping out from under the pale blue *busteczka* which came around her face! Her cheeks were soft and looked as sweet as cream in a pot. I kissed her with my eyes a thousand times. This girl I will bring home to my people!

We had arrived at the bridge where, the day before, I had stopped to get a drink. We stopped and leaned over the bent sapling that served as a handrail, and looked down at our reflections shaking in the water.

'I got a drink here yesterday,' I said, and when she looked down into the water we smiled at each other.

I thought of what I had decided to tell her.

'I have something to tell you, Sonia. Something which no one else could understand. I came to this village yesterday to buy tobacco for my comrades, but when

I saw you I just couldn't leave, and now they have gone on to the front without me: I am a deserter.'

'Oh, Wladek!'

'I had to tell you,' I said.

'What is there to do now? You will be in danger. Will they—?' She stopped and looked at me, and caught me by the hand. 'Do you think—?'

'I don't want to think about it,' I answered. 'We shall have to keep this from your parents.'

'Yes. It will not help us for them to know.'

'I will tell you this,' I said. 'Somehow I will come back to you.'

'Where will you go?'

'Ostroff is the headquarters for this district.'

'Oh, Wladek, this is too terrible!'

We were out of reach of the village eyes, so I took her in my arms. How is a man to state his love for a *dziewczynka*? At this moment I was overflowing with a thousand thoughts, but I could not think of one way to express them. I kissed her, and we clung closely together for a long while. At last I let her go.

'Now we must go back home,' Sonia said. '*Matka* will wonder what is happening to us.'

Slowly we walked back through the village. As we neared the house I said, 'I will come back, and you will be my wife, Sonia.'

She squeezed my hand. Who can measure the amount of bliss involved in the pressure between two lovers' hands!

Again that night, as the night before, Sonia was sent

to bed after supper. I sat and talked till bedtime with *Pan* Markow and his wife, who was a truly hospitable hostess, seeing to my every comfort, but a very suspicious mother, who disliked to trust strangers with her daughter. I bent my attention toward her, spending most of the time before going to bed trying to win her good graces.

I was up early, having slept but fitfully, and it was with much distraction that I faced the family at breakfast.

It was *Pan* Markow who began the conversation while we were eating.

'When do you have to be back in the city, my son?'

I was half-startled by his question, and I squirmed inwardly with shame at the lie I had constructed.

'I will take the ten-fifteen train tonight,' I replied.

'We will make a lunch for you to take along, so that you will not be hungry on the way,' *Sonia* offered, and *Pani* Markow nodded her head.

'I cannot thank you enough,' I said.

We finished eating, and soon the household was busy with the morning's tasks. I had nothing to pack, so I spent the rest of the day as near to *Sonia* as I could. The evening meal was eaten mostly in silence, and I was through in a hurry.

'Have you had enough?' inquired *Pani* Markow.

'Yes, plenty. Somehow I am not hungry.'

After we had sat around and talked for a while it was decided that *Sonia* could accompany me halfway to the

depot, and a little later we started out, after *Pan* and *Pani* Markow had given me their blessing.

The village was asleep, so we walked through it holding each other tightly. As we went along the road our hearts were beating out words that we could not express, and too soon we arrived at the bridge. We stood there in the darkness. How is a man to say good-bye, when everything is so still except himself!

Sonia was looking up at the moon. I saw her eyes in the moonlight. Her face was close to mine, and her breath was soft and warm upon my cheek.

'The man in the moon can see us, Sonia. I promise him that I will come back to you. Nothing will stop me.' I kissed her for a long time.

It was hard for me to take my arms from around her. How is it possible to be happy and unhappy at the same time!

'Turn around, Sonia, and go straight home. Don't look back,' I commanded.

I had to hold on to the bridge to keep from following her. I was already at the depot and the train was in sight before I discovered that I had left the lunch *Pani* Markow had prepared for me on the bridge.

DWA

THE TRAIN CHUGGED UP AND HALTED. I found a seat in a fourth-class car, and in a few minutes we pulled out. I wasn't feeling very funny. Something inside me felt as though it had been torn out by the roots. The time dragged by. I could see a group of men line up and take aim at me, their rifles spitting fire, the bullets whacking into me; and I would flop over with my face torn off, my chest crushed in. I felt of my face and began to shiver all over. I got sick and had to lean out of the window and let it go. After that I sat back in my seat, limp as a rag, feeling the sickness crawling over me.

I must have dozed off, because I suddenly came to myself with a start, like waking from a nightmare. The train had stopped at a small depot. Some passengers came in and sat down. I got up and got a drink. The clock in the depot window said seven o'clock. We were due in Ostroff at eight.

I sat back down and began to reason like this: If I get off this train I'll get shot. If I stay on the train I won't get shot. But there is no place in Poland that

is safe for a deserter. What a mixup! The only way I can clean everything up is to get shot. For three days of heaven they send me to hell. I am not an enemy to my country; I still want to fight the Bolsheviks. The thing I did I couldn't help doing. If they killed me a thousand times I would do it again; there is something impossibly right about what I did. I am not afraid to die, I just don't want to die.

The sun was well up in the sky when the train stopped at Ostroff. I walked around the square and found a *szynk*. I was hungry. While I was eating I found out from the *szynk-właściciel* that the headquarters of the Ostroff district was located about a mile out of town. I bought a package of cigarettes and started out along the road. On the way I met a squad of men with shovels in their hands.

'Where is the office of the Commandant?'

'You will see a small brick building just before you get to the *koszary*. That is it,' they returned.

A sentry was on guard by the door. He snapped his rifle up.

'What do you want?'

'I want to see the commanding officer.'

'Colonel Dumbrowsky will arrive here in about an hour. You can talk to his orderly.'

'I might as well get it over with,' I thought.

'Let me see the orderly, then.'

The guard stepped aside, and I walked into the office. A big thick-faced sergeant was sitting behind the desk. He looked up and said, 'What is it?'

At first I couldn't think of just what I wanted to say. There was more to it than a few words. I began to see how hard it was going to be for them to understand my reason for not going up to the front with my comrades. And right then I decided to tell a lie.

'What do you want?' the orderly asked again. '*Dla czego nie mówie?* Speak up! Speak up!'

'I am Wlodek Stanislow, Company 28, *piechota*. I was left behind when I was off on a mission for an officer, and now I am trying to rejoin my comrades.'

He thumbed through a sheaf of papers on the desk, found one, and after looking at it for a while, said, 'Wait just a minute.' He got up and went through a side door and came back almost instantly with two other soldiers who had rifles in their hands. He came up and grabbed me.

'Take this man to the guardhouse! Wait. Search him first.'

They took everything out of my pockets and then marched me back through the door they had entered. A few steps away I saw a small brick building. They unlocked the door and shoved me in. I didn't realize till after they had locked me up that the paper the sergeant had looked at had probably been the report sent in by Captain Orlinski when I did not report back to the depot. I decided to tell them that I had missed the train.

The guardhouse was made of red brick in the same manner as the large *koszary* I had seen as I came up the road. I sat on the small bench, the only thing there

besides myself, and looked at the small barred window near the ceiling, which was the only source of light. I sat there for about an hour, and I began to think that maybe I should have stayed on the train.

At last I heard the guards coming. The door opened and one of them said, '*Chadź ze mną!* Come with me!'

We went into the office. I stood before the Commandant. He was a large gray-haired man with a sharp red nose, and eyes like blisters. He kept them closed most of the time, but when he looked at you it was like looking down the barrels of two rifles.

'You are Wlodek Stanislow?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Why are you here?'

'I missed the train after I had gone on a mission for my captain.'

He opened his eyes. 'Why didn't you take the next train? You have been absent four days!'

I could see he had me. He knew I was lying.

'Speak up! What have you to say for yourself?'

His eyes rifled me with contempt. I couldn't think of a thing to say. I was only making it worse by lying.

'Throw him back in the guardhouse!' he shouted impatiently.

I stayed in the guardhouse all night without food, sitting on the bench without being able to sleep. I knew they were not through with me. I knew what was going to happen. They would hold a court-martial, and then they would shoot me regardless of what I had to say.

When it got light enough for me to see I searched the

room over inch by inch. I stood on the bench and looked out of the small barred window. I tried the door with all my strength. They had made this room to keep people in, I could see that. All I could do was wait for it.

I was looking out of the window when I saw the guards coming. One of them watched while the other handed me a piece of bread and a bowl of *borszt*. They had taken my cigarettes when they searched me.

'Give me back my cigarettes,' I requested.

'Do we have his cigarettes?' one of them asked.

'No, we have smoked them already,' the other one said, and they both laughed.

'You should get paid for such jokes,' I remarked.

'What are they going to do with me?' I asked.

'He wants to know what they are going to do with him,' the first one said. He was short and fat and had a big red nose.

'Tell him to stick around and find out,' the other one suggested. They were having a lot of fun laughing as they banged the door closed.

I couldn't eat the food. I was hungry, but I couldn't eat it. I threw the bowl down and beat on the door with my fists till I was exhausted, and then I began pacing the floor.

A few hours later the two guards came again. They opened the door and grinned at me, but I kept my eyes away from them as they marched me across the street into a long brick building. We entered a large room. Sitting behind a long table with a green cloth on it were Colonel Dumbrowsky and five other officers. Behind

them, draped across the wall, was the Polish flag. The guards escorted me up to a stall at one end of the table. It had a door with a latch on it. Inside was a stool. I sat down and the guards stood behind me.

One of the officers got up and came over to me. 'I am your defender,' he said. 'Is there anything you want to tell me besides what you have already said? I will do all I can for you.'

He was an earnest-looking man, but how could I even hope to make him understand in a few words! I could see that they were not going to waste much time on me. They had me dead to rights. They had hardly looked up as I came in, and one of them was whispering something funny in the ear of the officer nearest him.

'Let me make my statement,' I replied, 'and then maybe you can find some way to help me. God knows I will appreciate anything you can do for me.'

'If that's the way you want it,' he rejoined. And then he nodded to the Commandant, who wasted no words as he spoke to me.

'Wladek Stanislow, you have deserted your country almost in the face of the enemy. We are here to pass upon your fate. What have you to say in your behalf? Mark your words well, and speak out plainly, with no attempt to falsify yourself. Anything you say may be used against you.'

I decided to tell the truth. If that could not save me, I was willing to die.

'For four days, sir, I have been absent without leave from my comrades. I am well aware of the penalty of

such an act. So I have put myself, of my own accord, in your hands, not to plead for mercy, but to ask that you understand my reason for this breach of duty. You may do with me as you wish. I have only this to say: I love my country; I am willing to die for its cause, but when I saw this girl, I could not help myself, something inside of me which I did not even know existed made me forget, for a while, my duty to Poland. Desertion was farthest from my mind ——' I stopped because the Commandant had jumped to his feet and was pounding his fist on the table, red-faced, and shaking with anger.

'What! A girl!' he shouted.

He was beside himself. I thought he was going to shoot me on the spot. I had never seen a man so angry before. I did not have time to say another word. He sat down as suddenly as he had got up, and began speaking to me in a cold flat voice.

'Your offense is worse than I had suspected. You saw a girl. Bah! What if all our soldiers happened to see a girl! We are not having enough trouble with the Russians. *By God*, I'll make an example of you: I hereby sentence you to be shot within the hour!'

He spoke to the guards. 'Take him away!'

While the two guards were taking me to the door I heard the officer who had been appointed my defender speaking in my behalf.

'This man has admitted his guilt, but he says he is still willing to fight for his country. He has committed a grave offense, yes, but we must bear in mind that a live soldier is better than a thousand dead ones. Poland needs

every man she has. I ask you to reconsider this matter, sir. Poland is slowly dying, man by man ——'

They pushed me out and closed the door, and I was back in my cell before I could feel anything. In an hour I should be dead, killed by the soldiers of my own country. I thought of the shame that would come to my parents, my little brother, my brother in France, and the one in Switzerland. And then I thought of Sonia. I could write her a letter. Would they take the time to send it if I wrote it? But why write a letter? What was there to say?

I had been sitting humped over on the little bench for about twenty minutes when I heard them come up to the door. There was a pause while the door was being unlocked. When it swung out I saw an officer standing in front of a squad of men. They had come to a halt without bringing their guns to the ground, as though they expected to move off shortly. The officer had a paper in his hand.

'Wladek Stanislow,' he announced, 'this is your death warrant. Is there anything you want to say?'

The whole thing had got beyond words. I wanted to tell him to wait a few minutes till I could do a little thinking, but I couldn't make a sound. I had a million things to say, but my tongue was like lead in my mouth. I could see that he was taking my silence to mean that I had nothing to say, and I was powerless to do anything about it.

He stepped to one side. 'Bind the prisoner's hands behind him.' As soon as my hands were bound they

pushed me through the door. The firing squad did an about-face, and the officer placed me between the two ranks. 'March,' he commanded.

I could not move. The man behind pushed me and I began walking. We came to a high brick wall and halted. I was facing the wall. The officer turned me around, and I saw the firing squad march off and line up facing me, with their rifles resting on the ground. Whipping out his sword, the officer marched up and stood at one side of the men.

I felt my stomach knotting up. My legs felt like sticks. I could not get enough air. My lungs were about to burst, and my throat was stopped up. I knew I was not making a sound, but I seemed to be shrieking at the top of my voice. My life seemed to be pumping up into my eyes.

I saw the rifles go up to their shoulders and level off at me as the officer raised his sword in the air. It takes a little time to aim a rifle, and the officer was giving his men time to find their sights. I could see each one of them find me. The men were of different sizes, and their rifles were not on the same level at the back where the butt hid their sighting eyes. They were waiting for the officer's voice.

I saw the word forming on his lips, and I had a thought coming to me; I tried to make it come faster. I knew I was dead, because they were going to fire. I realized what death was, and I had a new respect for it: it was proof that you were alive, the only proof you can have. That was the thought that I was trying to hurry.

I felt safe with this knowledge, and waited for the end of the instant to bring the bullets.

I heard a voice shout, 'Wait!' and saw the sword waver like a long silver leaf in the wind. Then I must have fainted, because there were a lot of soldiers standing around looking down at me. I was lying on the ground, too tired to get up. I wanted to go to sleep.

I was on a cot in a room when I woke up again. The two guards were in the room.

'You fellows are persistent, anyway,' I said.

They laughed.

'What makes you so sleepy?' the short fat one asked.

'What happened?' I inquired.

'The Commandant reconsidered. You are a lucky son-of-a-bitch.' He was smoking a cigarette.

'Give me one of my cigarettes,' I said.

He tossed me his package. 'A fellow as *szczęśliwy* as you can have all his cigarettes back,' he remarked.

'I'll have to thank that defender.'

'His company left just awhile ago,' the guard who had not spoken anything said. 'We're going to accompany you to the front with a dehospitalized detail,' he continued.

'What a soft job you two *człowieks* have got!' I exclaimed.

'You had better get up and eat. We are going to leave in about an hour,' the short one said.

After I had eaten I fell in with the detail and marched to the depot.

I had to sit next to the two guards.

'Where are we going?' I asked.

'Sarny.'

'No, Sarny is not on the railroad,' the talkative one objected.

'All right, *Pan Atlas*, where is it, then?'

'I don't know where it is, but it's not on the railroad.'

'How do you know?' I interrupted.

'That's where I live,' he said.

'Well, just to keep the books straight, where is Sarny?' I asked.

'If the Bolsheviks haven't moved it, it's about five miles north of the railroad at the junction we are going to take you to.'

'Is that satisfactory to you?' I asked the other fellow.

'What?' he said.

'Oh, Jesus!' I cried.

We traveled all day and night and the next day, and the following morning we got off at the junction. It was just a long shed by the tracks. A sergeant came up and took charge of the detail. There were fifteen of us. We marched off through the woods along a newly made road that was full of deep muddy ruts.

Once in a while, when the wind was coming strong, we could hear the sound of firing. We were without arms. The sergeant said we would get rifles when we located my company. After about an hour we left the road and struck off through the woods in the direction of the firing. We began hearing it without the aid of the wind. I could distinguish the scattered shots of the rifles from the quick snorts of the machine guns. They

(TWO ALONE)

were using artillery too, but they weren't firing very often.

I caught up with the sergeant. He was a big husky fellow with a long scar across his forehead that came down over his eye and divided his beard on the left side of his face.

'Where is Company 28 located?'

'They were camped on a little hill just beyond these woods when I left them last night '

'How much farther is it?'

'Ten minutes will get us there.'

TRZY

WE KNEW WE WERE NEAR ONE END OF THE battle, because the loud pop-pop-popping was accompanied by fainter pop-popping, and it was all coming from our right. We were crossing a wide shallow valley made between low rolling hills, and although the trees were thinning out, they still blocked our sight. The floor of the valley was wet spongy *torf*-swamp, and we were picking our way through it in a slow, hunch-shouldered, neck-extended crouch. You get that way when you are going toward something that is coming toward you with the same idea.

I was muddy up to my hips from making missteps, and we were glad to get on the firm slope of the hill, where we stopped and tried to clean the mud off on the grass.

With the advantage of the height, when we got to the crest of the hill, we saw the black and red ruins of a burning farmhouse, and on beyond, extending to the right, was a low blue haze that was the smoke of the battle. From where we stood, it looked as if the fighting were being done in a clearing stretching across a wide valley. We circled around to come up behind our lines.

We advanced almost to the edge of the clearing, but we were still in the woods. It looked as though the Russians had advanced into the woods, and had then been forced back out into the clearing, because there were freshly dead Bolsheviks on the ground among the dark gray uniforms of my comrades. Some of them were Cossacks, there were dead horses here and there, but the most of them were Russian infantry.

The Cossacks sweep up in flank attacks while the infantry is making an advance, and hack their way through and wheel off and come back. You have to shoot the horse to get a Cossack, he rides so low on his horse: the first line comes at you with spears, and if they miss anybody the next line gets them using quarter-moon sabers, and if you are busy with a foot soldier, they get you either in the belly with the spear, or in the neck with the saber. These fellows are no good in the woods, though. It looked as if they must have got caught in front of their infantry, before it had got close enough to begin the hand-to-hand stuff, and had had to go on in the woods to keep from breaking up their infantry's charge. They must have made nice slow targets, because there were plenty of dead horses all through the trees.

I picked up a rifle near a bloody-faced body. As I was stripping off the man's ammunition belt I turned him over, and that made the top of his head fall back like the lid of a coffee-pot. He was shot in the head. The bullet usually splits your head open, depending on where it hits; most of the time it splits up and down, but it depends upon how the bullet is coming: if it strikes in a

glancing direction it will strip off the flesh, and you will bleed to death while you are unconscious. When it hits you in the body it makes a neat round hole, and if it doesn't get bent off its course by a bone and tear up your guts, it tears a big gap out of your back when it goes out. If you are lucky enough to fall on a body wound, you may keep yourself from bleeding to death before they can come and get you.

I reloaded the rifle as I walked. It was a Polish weapon, because it had a blade bayonet. The Russian bayonet is three-cornered, and is kept filed to a needle point. If they stick you in the belly with it, the hole closes up, and you bleed on the inside.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see two of the detail hanging back. If they felt like that, it was just as well, because they wouldn't be any good anyway. If you are fighting beside a fellow that's *bojacy* you have too big a gap to cover, and you have to think about protecting yourself against his man too.

The two *bojacy* fellows had each got behind a tree. We were almost out of the woods. Something ripped off the side of my shoe, and after a few steps it fell off. I had to go on without it. We got out into the clearing and began running forward among some low stumps. Something socked into the sergeant and he was groaning and telling us to go on. After we got out into the open he fell down and stayed there.

You had to break your stride to keep from stepping on the bloody bodies, and some of them weren't dead. Blood is the ugliest thing in the world, especially in a

pool around a man's head. It's slippery if you step in it, and in no time at all it begins to stink, and the flies get so fat they can't fly away.

The detail slowed down and deployed along the line to fill up the gaps. I was almost out of breath.

At first I couldn't figure out what the hell was happening, because the line was moving back, and then I saw why. The Bolsheviks were getting reinforcements. I could see them swarming down the hill on the other side of the valley, not yet in machine-gun range.

I started going back along the way we had come, kneeling and firing at the line of men that were advancing across the clearing. The horde behind them broke into double time and swung out fanwise to be less of a target for us, and to cover a wider front; they wanted to overtake us before we got back into the woods. The officers were waving for us to make a faster retreat, and we began to run. It became a kind of race, and then, out of nowhere, the Cossacks whipped up at our flank. We slowed down and swung our fire onto the horses. You can't hit anything when you are running. You have to stop and aim, and that takes time. We got a few of the horses, but they reached us before we reached the woods. The first man they came to fell flat on the ground, and a rider speared him like that; they all gave him a jab.

We crouched behind the stumps that were out in the clearing, shooting fast as they began to weave in, their spears catching up and pushing through the backs of the stragglers, who made a noise like a shriek and a cough, the impact lifting them and tumbling them, and then

the up-jerk as the point came out as the spearman passed. The sabermen streak in hacking, whirling and wheeling among the stumps, and we crouch and shoot the horses, and when they hit the ground we pot the rider before he has a chance to move, or, if he is close enough, we jab him in the belly and pull the trigger to make it sure. And then their infantry comes up and we drop back into the woods. If it hadn't been for the stumps the Cossacks could have stayed around and got the whole platoon.

I was out of ammunition, but there was plenty on the dead men, and I kept firing and going back through the trees. A sergeant with a bandaged head was yelling to hold them off and go back slowly so we could make a stand in the town that was a few miles in the rear. I stopped long enough to take a shoe off a corpse, and I was lucky enough to get a good fit.

In a disorderly retreat through woods you never know what you are backing into, but we came into the town just before dark, and had time to get some soup and bread. Our retreat had been covered by machine guns: they set up in a good spot and spray awhile, and then move back and set up again. Our objective was to hold them here as long as we could, to give the main force a chance to make an orderly retreat.

A detail was already digging shallow trenches, and field guns were being brought into position on three sides of the town, which I had found out was Sarny. We were dirty and sweaty and bloody, and we knew they would attack before dawn.

CZTERY

SARNY WAS JUST BIG ENOUGH. THE BOL-sheviks couldn't afford not to take it, and our forces were large enough to make them stop to organize their attack. There were three companies of us scattered along three sides of the town, with most of the defense assembled facing the road that led into the town from the direction we had come.

A circle of woods surrounded us, but they were more than a rifle shot away. Along the outskirts of the town were small fruit gardens, with trees and small bushes and little banks of dirt to get behind. We were out in these, sniping the enemy as they crawled up through the short bushes that were between us and the woods, until it got too dark to see. There wasn't much to do after that but watch and shoot at the flashes. We knew what they were going to do, though, and pretty soon they did it.

From two sides, at the edge of the woods, they began pumping at us with mountain guns. You could see the flashes and hear the whack when they made a hit on one of the houses. Sometimes a house would groan and fall over. Our fieldpieces blasted back, but they were just

shooting at the flashes too. A house caught fire close in back of us, and lit up everything.

We knew their infantry wouldn't come too close in, because they wouldn't have a chance against the machine guns. We were lying in a fruit garden, behind a long low bank, peeping out into the darkness through a camouflage of brush. A few yards away someone else was squatting in the darkness waiting to see some kind of movement to shoot at.

One *człowiek* kept snickering and whispering to himself and looking around as if he were trying to find something he had lost, and he was getting all of us jumpy. He sat up and then flopped over and began gurgling. He had got it in the neck, and the blood was coming in a little black stream along the bottom of the bank. I had to stay where I was, so I scraped some dirt up and blocked it off.

Finally the flames of the burning house died down without setting anything else afire, because, by good luck, there wasn't any wind. We were lying close enough to each other to talk, and I tried to find out where my company was, but all I found out was that it wasn't there.

A runner crawled up and told us to move back into the main street. We were going to retreat from Sarny along the main road. We had to move out before day-break, because in the daylight they could wipe us out in one charge. In the dark we were safe enough because they couldn't tell how strong we were. They would smell something when our field guns quit, but they

would wait till dawn to do anything. By that time we would be out of reach. That was to be our tactics till we joined up with the main force again, stopping at night to hold them back, and then going on again before they could attack.

We formed our column along the street in the dark. The old men and women who were all that were left of the evacuated town's population went up and down the line begging us to stay and protect them against the Bolsheviks.

'God in heaven, what shall we do? We cannot march!' they said.

The only thing for them to do, we told them, was to hide in the woods till the Bolsheviks went by. We went out of town at double time, and continued at a fast pace along the deserted countryside. By noon we began overtaking some of the townspeople who had left Sarny with what possessions they were able to bundle up in a hurry. They went along with us, asking excitedly about the Russians.

'We saw an illumination! Is Sarny in flames?'

'How far away are they?'

'What will happen to us?'

'Keep going,' we replied. 'You will be safe if you keep going.'

We came upon broken-down wagons standing in the road with their traces cut. Exhausted horses that had been left behind were standing off in the trees. Chickens, pigs, and cows were running around loose. Discarded furniture and bedding were all along the road, thrown

away by the hurrying populace. The whole countryside had been retreating for days. Each village we passed was all but deserted, the villagers either in hiding or fleeing along the road ahead of us.

For three days we marched, stopping each night in a small town, and being shelled out before dawn, foraging food from the villages and farms we passed. On the fourth night the Bolsheviks did not come up with us. We were nearing Ostroff and they were holding off to reorganize their forces.

In the middle of the next morning we marched through the town and out along the road to the *koszary*. This was a hell of a place for me to come back to, especially since I still had not located my company, but I was so tired I didn't give a damn what happened to me. My clothes were in rags, my feet were sore, and I was dirty and red-eyed from loss of sleep.

We halted in front of the *koszary* and fell out on the grass to wait to be assigned to bunks in the building. The street was crowded with soldiers going here and there. I saw a face that was familiar, and I ran over and grabbed the man by the shoulder.

'Josef Walinsky!'

He turned around.

'Well, where in the hell have you been?' he shouted.

'Killing Bolsheviks,' I said.

He made a face. 'All that's left of our platoon is me and the first sergeant — and you.'

'Jesus! Wiped out?'

'Slaughtered.'

Antek Torsky was the sergeant's name. He was a big brute of a man, a veteran of the wars.

'Where is Antek?'

'*Szalony*. He goes around crying and pulling the buttons off his clothes. They had to lock him up.'

Josef waited around. When the officer in charge came back I told him I had found my company, and he released me to go and join it.

The supply sergeant looked me over and handed me a pair of pants, a shirt and coat, and a pair of shoes. When I asked for underclothes he just looked at me. I got through shaving and bathing just in time to eat the bread and soup they were handing out. I felt fresh and clean, but I was still tired and sleepy. I got into my bunk, and the next thing I knew Josef was waking me up.

'Let's go to town.'

'Tomorrow,' I said.

He shook me again.

'Get up, you monkey. This *is* tomorrow!'

I was logy, but after a while I felt fine. It was the middle of the afternoon. We got a pass, and I began breaking in the new shoes on the way to town. You always get a blister on the heel, especially in the summer-time. After you get them broken in they feel swell.

We walked around the market-place and went into a *szynk*. There was fresh white sand on the floor. The tables were empty, and the *właściciel*, a short freckle-faced little fellow, was going around swatting flies that were clotted up on the tables.

He recognized Josef. 'Ah, my friend. *A jak ty sie masz?*'

'Thirsty,' Josef replied.

We sat down. The proprietor came up and put his hand on Josef's shoulder. 'If I don't kill them they die anyway, so I just hurry it along. What will you boys have? It's a fine hot day, ha, ha! Do you want to eat, or drink, or both?'

'Who wants to eat?' Josef replied.

'I'm hungry,' I said.

'Bring me some vodka,' Josef ordered.

'Make mine *piwo z kielbasa*,' I directed.

'You can't get drunk on beer and sausage,' Josef said.

'I will drink with you after I eat.'

In a few minutes the little fellow brought the food. 'I have brought you some bread too,' he said.

'Good.'

He set the stuff down. 'I tell you it is work killing flies.'

'They wouldn't be so bad if they didn't have wings,' I suggested.

'You are right,' he agreed. 'The horseflies are the worst. They make a big spot on the cloth.'

He made a gesture at the flies that had congregated on the table. 'Bah!' he exclaimed.

Josef had already swallowed his drink.

'Bring me some more,' he said. 'No, my friend, bring me the bottle.'

'I've been drunk ever since I got here,' Josef explained.

'There's only one other amusement here. We'll go over there after a while.'

'I've got to write some letters,' I objected.

'Do it tomorrow.'

The proprietor came up with the bottle. 'This has been waiting for you a long time.'

'I'll fix that,' Josef said.

'Where is the post office?'

'Have a drink.'

'Not now.'

I caught the *szynk*-owner by the arm. 'Where is the post office?'

'You go on down this street and turn to the left, and you will find it in the depot at the end of that street.'

Josef didn't know about Sonia. I was worried. From the way we had retreated I figured the Bolsheviks had already got to Godsz. You couldn't find out anything from anybody. One guess was as good as another. A retreating army is full of puzzled soldiers.

I finished the beer and motioned for some more. 'Bring some more sausage too,' I told the fly-killer.

'Have some vodka,' Josef offered.

'I can feel the beer already. You better go easy on that stuff.'

'I'll do it tomorrow,' he said, and laughed. 'Let's go over there pretty soon.'

'I've got to go to the post office.'

'Do it tomorrow.'

The joke was getting funnier and funnier to him. I

poured out a drink of vodka. Some men came in and sat down. They were already well under way.

Josef got up and took the bottle over. 'Have any of you got anything to do tomorrow?' he asked.

They shook their heads.

'He's got to write some letters tomorrow,' Josef said, and pointed at me with the bottle in his hand.

They all thought it was funny. The saloonkeeper had let the flies go and was attending to the customers. Pretty soon the place was crowded. I went out into the street, and following the directions the *szynk-właściciel* had given me, I found the post office. I bought some postal cards, and wrote one home and one to Sonia. I handed them to the clerk and was walking out when he called me back.

'You can't send this one,' he told me.

I went back. It was the one to Sonia.

'We're not sending anything up to the front,' he explained.

'No trains that way?'

'All the trains are coming this way.'

I took the card back.

'Maybe she was able to hide in the woods till those bloody devils went past,' the clerk suggested.

For a second I couldn't understand what he meant, and then it dawned on me. 'I was thinking the same thing,' I replied, appreciating his attempt to be helpful. You can't expect privacy on a postal card.

I walked back to the *szynk*. I could hear music coming out of the place, and as I went in I saw Josef's big broad

back in a little group of backs that had their arms weaved around each other. They were over in one corner standing in front of the musicians, singing a song very badly:

Poland is not lost yet,
So long as we are alive.
The vodka is not sour yet,
So long as we are drinking it.

I sat down and felt of my shoes where the blisters were coming. For some reason you get a little satisfaction by feeling at the place where a shoe hurts. The proprietor came over.

‘How are the flies?’

‘You can’t do anything about flies,’ he said. ‘I kill them and they come back. What will you have?’

‘Vodka.’

‘I will bring it to you before you would have had time to drink it,’ he promised.

Finally the music stopped and the group swayed apart. Josef still had a bottle in his hand. He saw me and came over and sat down. He was nice and drunk.

‘Let’s go,’ I said.

‘Don’t worry. We’ll go over there after a while.’

‘My feet are blistered.’

‘You don’t use your feet,’ he replied.

Josef always thought like he was going through a tunnel. His thoughts ran along one track, and he had to get out of one tunnel before he could think of anything in another tunnel. The way he talked depended on how long the tunnel was.

‘I wasn’t thinking of that,’ I said.

'Have some of this think-killer.'

'Thanks.'

'Poor Antek!'

I wanted to steer him away from that tunnel.

'What time is it?'

'I haven't known that since the war started.'

'Have you heard from home lately?'

'Those bloody bastards!'

'This is good vodka.'

'You know what they look like? Apes. Apes on horseback.'

'Let's get something to eat.'

'A few more days and they will be here. That's what we are waiting for. We've got to let them catch up with us. Then after they cut us up we can retreat again.'

I gave up. It was too easy to think the same way he was thinking. The vodka was making me numb-faced. I went over to the proprietor.

'Here is some money. When you close up get a *droszka* and send us to *koszary* 16.'

'It shall be done,' he promised.

I sat down again. The musicians were playing something soft and sad. At least I thought it was.

'What kind of a *człowiek* are you?' I asked Josef. 'You have a full bottle, and my glass is dry.'

PIEĆ

THE COBBLESTONED THOROUGHFARE AND THE railroad came into Ostroff parallel to each other. We left the *koszary* and dug a long crescent-shaped trench across this double approach, just outside of the entrance to the town, in a wide level field. The woods were almost a mile away. We knew they had to come at us here, because they had to bring up their equipment along the road. For two days we had been eating and sleeping in the trench, and everything was ready for them.

The sergeant had just brought around some ammunition, and Josef was sitting on the empty box in the shadow of the trench.

'This heat is terrible,' he declared.

I retied my shoe. 'I got some swell blisters night before last.'

'The walk back did it.'

'We rode back.'

'The hell we did! Which foot is it?'

'Both heels.'

'Why didn't you go with the sick detail?'

'You have to have gangrene before they will look at you.'

(TWO ALONE)

'Did you hear that joke the big *człowiek* told me?'

'Which big *człowiek*?'

'The one with the — oh, you were at the post office.'

'What was the joke?'

'It's funny if you think about it right.'

'You don't have to build it up. Just tell it. If it's funny I'll laugh.'

'You don't want to laugh. You want to think about those blisters.'

'Sure I want to laugh. I like to laugh.'

'You wouldn't laugh now if it were the funniest thing you ever heard.'

'I'll laugh, all right. Just tell it.'

'Now you've got me thinking it's not funny.'

'Jesus, I'm sure it's funny. Go ahead and tell it.'

'Have you got a cigarette?'

'Is that the joke?'

'No.'

I handed him my pack and he took two. 'One for my brother,' he explained, grinning.

'Don't forget about the joke,' I said.

'It's not very long. It's just a few words.'

'All right, *tell* it.'

'All right, but I'll bet you don't laugh: If you had been born twins, which one would you want to be, the one that comes out first, or the one that comes out last?'

'Is that the joke?' I asked.

'I knew you weren't going to laugh.'

'It might be funny if I were drunk.'

'It's funny any time. I think it is funny right now.'

The sergeant blew his whistle, and we got up. The Lieutenant came down the line giving his orders: Take your positions. No conversations. No smoking. Fix bayonets. Inspect your arms. He went on past, repeating what he was saying farther on, till I couldn't hear him any more.

We were preparing to receive an attack, and everyone got busy. I looked in the breech of my rifle, and stuck the shell that flipped out back in. Josef was doing the same thing.

'Anyway, it's funny to me,' he said.

'I'll think about it sometime when I'm drunk,' I promised him.

I didn't feel like talking any more. You don't like to use your voice at a time like this, because if it happens to quiver, it takes something out of you, and you need everything you've got, to make yourself think of what you are going to do.

They opened up with mountain guns from the woods, and then we began seeing them come out from behind the trees. When they got close enough we began firing as fast as possible, without taking aim, because of the way they were massed up. All you had to do was hold the rifle steady and pull the trigger. Our fieldpieces were going, and the machine guns were stuttering, and they were falling, plenty of them were going down, but it wasn't stopping them. They just kept on coming out of the woods.

We climbed up out of the trench to meet them when they got too close. Something took my hat off. I

glanced over at Josef. He was walking in a low crouch, kneeling down to fire; but I saw something else: Cossack cavalry were flanking us, coming along the curving rim of the trench. They were coming across from both sides, taking care not to come too fast, wheeling in and out, riding low, catching them from behind and hacking. You could see that some of the fellows didn't know they were there, and these they just rode up and hacked, and went on to the next.

You have to concentrate in an advance, and the noise is everywhere; you expect the biggest danger from the front, and watch for some way to shield yourself till you can get at them. When you first start out for them you really don't hate them; you just want to kill them to get them out of the way. But in a few minutes you do begin hating them, because you see them killing your comrades, and you want to kill them. You want to kill as many as you can; you come up to a man and he tries to kill you, and you begin hating him, and all the rest of them from then on. You kill him with all your power, you kill him and hate him while you are doing it, and you are satisfied each time you do it; it is a relief to do it, and you feel like you ought to do it as much as you can. And you begin looking for the next one, and there he is, and you figure you will kill him before he has a chance to kill you: it doesn't matter if he's looking or not; you can stab him, or if you have time, you can shoot him, and if he gets aware of it too soon, you smash him with the butt before he can make out how to kill you.

We were in too close to do much shooting. I knew

Josef was on my right, and I was getting tired of using the bayonet. You have to pull it out quick to take care of the next one before he gets his action started; you can't wait to see if he is dead; you can stick him again, but usually you don't have time, because there is another one coming at you.

Everything was happening. We were outnumbered; as soon as you got through with one there was another and another. Then I saw this big fellow coming a little way off to my right, and the next thing I knew I heard Josef say, 'Jesus!' and when I looked around he had his foot against Josef's chest and was trying to pull out the bayonet, but Josef had swayed to one side and the bayonet was lodged in and hard to get out, and he was shoving him down with his heel and jerking up when I stuck mine into him, straight in the back, below the bones, in the soft spot. I felt it going in; nothing stopped it, and it went in, and I knew it came out on the other side.

He let go and his foot fell back off Josef's chest, and they both dropped together. I pulled the trigger, because this *człowiek* had to get it all, and then something hit my head as if to split it, and the whole world disappeared and got black.

When I opened my eyes it was night and the stars were out. At first I couldn't understand why I had such a headache, and then I remembered getting hit on the head. It was cool and quiet and I thought about trying to get up, but I couldn't seem to make any kind of movement without starting some kind of pain in my legs and

arms. I wanted to shout, but when I opened my mouth to do it, no sound came out. My mouth was dry, and I was thirsty.

I knew I had some kind of wound in the head, because when I tried to look around, it began hurting and throbbing more than ever. I was weak from the loss of blood, but I managed to bring my hand up and feel the place. It was wet and sticky, and the hair was all clotted up. I raised myself up a little and looked around. The moon was bright, and I could see that I was alone in a battlefield thick with dead men.

I tried to think of what to do. My brain had a clumsy, fuzzy feeling. I began crawling back toward the town. The effort made me dizzy, and while I was moving I couldn't seem to see what I was doing. When I came to a body I crawled over it, my hands slipping in the pools of blood. Once my hand went down into an open stomach; the man's guts were cold and slick and squirmy. I vomited in his face, and lay there a long time without the strength to move.

I got started again, and before I knew it I fell down in the trench, and fainted with the pain. When I came to, I crawled along the bottom of the trench till I found some steps. It took me a long time to make it, pulling myself up, one step at a time. I got on the cobblestones, and sticking my fingers down into the cracks between the stones, I pulled myself along the road inch by inch. I would stop once in a while to rest, and before I would start on again, I would look around while my head was clear to see if I could see a house.

It was getting harder for me to pull myself along. My fingers were getting sore and stiff. I made out a house a long way up in front of me, but it looked too far away to reach. I didn't think I could make it. I tried to get up on my knees, but it was impossible.

I knew the Russian burying parties would finish me off if they found me still alive in the morning. The moon was already getting low over the trees outside of the town. Somehow I began pulling myself along again. I was in a hurry, and I was working as fast as I could, but I was going as slow as a snail. I concentrated on passing one row of stones at a time.

The darkness was beginning to fade out of the sky when I got near the house, and when I got up to the door I couldn't get my fist doubled up, or lift it high enough to knock. I got a little closer and propped my wrist up to the wood and began scratching. Then everything went blank.

When I woke up, all I could see at first was darkness. I turned my head a little, and then I saw some streaks of light that looked like cracks in a wall. When my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I could see that I was in an attic. My head was still aching, and when I felt of it I found out that it was bandaged. I was lying on a pallet on the floor. Just then I heard some footsteps, as if someone were climbing a ladder. I could hear the feet scraping each rung, and then I saw a gray head rise up slowly from the opening in the floor.

When the face came up I saw it was an old lady. I

raised myself up on my elbow. Her eyes were soft and kind. She had a bowl of something in her hand, and when she saw I was awake she smiled at me. Setting the bowl down, she climbed up out of the hole, sighing with the effort. She came over and put the bowl in front of my nose. It was soup.

'Ah, my son,' she said. 'I thought you were going to die before I could feed you.' She stirred the soup with a spoon.

'Where am I?' I asked. 'What has happened to me?'

She put her finger to her lips. 'Shhh,' she whispered. 'You must be quiet,' pointing at the cracks in the wall. 'The Bolsheviks will hear you. If they find you here they will blow up the house. I have seen them do it with my own eyes!'

She propped me up on the pillows, and while I was eating the soup, the old lady explained that she and her husband had heard me scratching on the door, and had hidden me in their attic.

'There are a great number of Russian soldiers here, burying the dead and plundering the town,' she said. 'My poor husband has to help them dig the graves. We have little food, and are fearful of our lives.'

'Where are my comrades?' I asked.

'With God's help they are defending Warsaw. It is rumored that the invaders have only to cross the Vistula to be at the gates of our great city! Already the soldiers have posted a proclamation saying that this is Russian territory, and that we are now Russian subjects. These last three days have brought bitter sorrow upon us.'

'I have not been here three days!'

'Yes. For three days and nights I have had to muffle your mouth with my hands to keep the Bolsheviks from hearing your shouts and groans. Such a raving delirium I have never seen! Only this afternoon have you been quiet enough for me to leave you for a little while. Is your mother named Sonia? You spoke of her more than you did anything else.'

'It is the name of the *dzieweczinka* I am going to marry. She lives in Godsz. How far is that from here?'

'A good two days' journey.'

She saw by the way that I had asked the question that I was already planning to go.

'But you are not strong enough to make such a trip, and besides, you could get nowhere in that uniform.'

I made up my mind. This place was not safe for me. If the Bolsheviks found me here they would kill these two people. It didn't make much difference, now, where I was. One place was as dangerous as the next. I was too far behind the lines to reach my comrades alive. And even if I did get back they would call it desertion, because of the other time, and this time they wouldn't stop just before they pulled the trigger; they would go ahead and pull it, and that was no way to die, especially when it's not your fault. The hell with going back!

'I've got to leave tonight,' I told the old lady. 'You have been kind to me, and I can't tell you how much I thank you, but I've got to go tonight.'

'Look out through those cracks,' she directed. 'The country is full of Bolsheviks!'

'I have made up my mind,' I said.

'You must want to die,' she answered; 'but give me your uniform, and I will try to change it, and dye it.'

I heard her moving around all afternoon. In the evening her husband came up the ladder. He was white-haired, and he had a crippled hand. He was trying to persuade me to stay a few days longer.

'You are in no condition to travel,' he said. 'You have a bad wound.'

'I will make it,' I replied.

His wife came up with some bread and soup. 'I have done as much as possible with it,' she said, holding up the coat and pants. She had dyed them black, and had taken the shoulders of the coat apart and sewed it back differently. The buttons were changed, and she had put a cuff on the pants.

'You did a good job,' I answered.

'If you are still going,' she continued, 'it would be best for you to wait till early in the morning. You could leave before the soldiers get up, and if you walk all day and tomorrow night, you ought to get there before the day breaks.'

'That is what I will do, then,' I said.

After I had eaten they climbed back down the ladder and went to bed to keep from arousing suspicion in case someone came in to see them.

I woke up while it was still dark and climbed down. The old man had given me an old cap to cover the bandage. They were awake too.

'God bless you,' they called in the darkness.

As I went by the table I left some money on it. Going out the back door, I crouched down low and went out through their field till I came to some woods. After going through the trees for about a mile I turned to the left, as they had directed me, and in a few minutes I hit the road that would take me to Godsz.

I didn't meet a soul all day long. The road lay through a thick forest, but just about dusk a side road came in, and I could see some tracks that had been left by wagons. I was taking my time because I was weak from the loss of blood, but otherwise the wound was not bothering me. I was trying to figure out what it was that had hit me. Probably the butt of a rifle. The place on my head was a gash on a big bump. A bullet would have made a hole, or a ragged gap.

I could still feel myself sticking the bayonet into that big *człowiek*. It felt something like the way you stick a knife into a loaf of bread. You start it in and it's easy in the middle, and with a little force, you push it out the other side. But I knew I was sticking it through something alive because of the way it gave as the point started in; it sort of sliced in, and then he shrieked.

And then I got the clout on the side of the head. I wasn't sure whether or not I made any sound when it hit me, but I must have. I must have grunted or something. Every *człowiek* I ever saw get it always made some kind of sound. Usually it's a grunt, or a gurgle, and then they yell like hell, if it doesn't knock them out. It takes a little while for the pain to register, and then they begin shrieking or groaning; if they are con-

scious it usually is a shriek, and if they are unconscious it usually is a groan. I must have done some groaning.

That's the way to turn pain into sound; you feel it and then you make some kind of noise, and this lets them know you are hurt, the sounds you make making them know how you feel without telling them in words, because they know how it feels to be hurt. But you don't even have to make a sound to make them aware of the pain; they can tell by the way your face looks. The look on your face is like a shriek.

I was so absorbed in this thinking that I didn't hear the wagon catch up with me. The first thing I knew I heard someone shouting, 'Hey, get out of the way!'

I jumped, and when I turned around I saw a man sitting on the wagon. He was speaking Polish, so I knew he wasn't Russian. I got out of the way.

'I didn't hear you,' I said.

He was still snickering at the way I had jumped.

'How about letting me ride?' I asked.

He considered it awhile, looking me over, and then he said, 'Where are you going?'

'Godsz.'

He was peering down at me with a foolish snaggle-toothed grin on his face, and there was a sly look in his eyes.

'What are you going to Godsz for?'

'I've got relatives there.'

I figured him out as one of those sneaking bastards who stoop to anything that requires a slimy conscience. I could tell that he was already suspicious of me, and I

knew he would not hesitate to betray me to the first Bolshevik camp he passed for the bounty they offered for Polish soldiers who were caught behind the lines. I didn't intend to let him go on alone ahead of me.

He must have read this thought in my face, because he said, 'All right. Climb up.'

After a while it got dark, and as we rode on I pretended to be thinking about something, to keep him from asking too many questions. I could feel his eyes running over me like bloodsucking bugs, and I knew there were putrid thoughts crawling around in his head.

'Where do you live?' he asked.

'A few miles back.'

'On a farm?'

'Yes.'

'Had a big battle in Ostroff, didn't they?'

'Yes.'

'You see any of the Bolsheviks?'

'Yes.'

'We got licked.'

'Yes.'

'What did the Bolsheviks say to you?'

'They didn't see me.'

'Hiding, eh?'

'Yes.'

'I am too old to fight,' he said.

I didn't say anything. I felt like choking him to death. We followed the road up a hill through the trees, and when we started down the other side I could see a large bonfire. The road wasn't going toward it,

however. As we descended the hill I heard a shot and then another, coming from the direction of the fire we had seen.

'It's the Bolsheviks,' the driver explained; 'they're still celebrating.'

'What are they doing way out here?' I asked.

'You can't ever tell,' he said.

We came to the bottom of the hill. The trees had thinned out a little, and the ground was level. I watched the road to see if it was going to turn in the direction of the fire. Pretty soon we were near enough to hear them laughing and shouting, although we couldn't see them. I was beginning to think that we were going to pass them up, when I saw a fork in the road. It was going off in their direction.

As we came to it the driver suddenly whipped up his horses, grabbing me with both arms, as the wagon turned into the fork. He was shouting something to the Bolsheviks as loud as he could.

I broke his hold and swung my fist into his face, and when he let go, I jumped off onto the ground, falling head over heels and rolling into the bushes. The wagon kept on going, and I got up and ran through the woods till I hit the road we had been using.

In a few minutes I heard them coming, shouting and shooting, and making a lot of racket to scare me. I got off the road and went along through the trees as fast as I could, trying to guard my head with my hands from the low-hanging branches. They came to the fork and turned back toward me. I was far enough into the woods

to be out of sight. They came up about even with me and halted to listen, and sure enough I had to step on a rotten limb. They heard me and began firing, the bullets slapping into the trees near me.

I moved away, bumping into trees and straddling bushes as I went. They dismounted and came into the woods after me, running and firing, and I ran on till I came to a wide field. I saw some of the horsemen down at the road watching to see if I would come out into the field. The others were still coming behind me, so I followed the edge of the woods around the field, moving along from tree to tree, catching each branch and letting it back as I passed, stepping swiftly and fingering the boles of the trees to keep as close to them as possible. They had stopped firing to hear me better, and when they came to the field they saw me and began firing again. The men on horses came charging up, but I went on in deeper. I circled around, keeping the edge of the field in sight to avoid getting lost, till I was on the other side of the field. The horsemen on the other side of the field had dismounted and gone into the woods, but they hadn't followed me around, thinking that I had gone deeper into the woods in back of the field. I was walking on soft pine needles, not making a sound. The woods were quiet all around. The fast pace had taken most of my strength.

When I saw the road again I turned and started going parallel with it, slipping along quietly on the thick carpet of pine needles. I came up to a graveyard, and I knew I should have to stop and rest for a while. I was

all petered out. Getting down by the side of a large gravestone, I lay flat on the ground till I was breathing normally again.

I listened for a long time without hearing them. They had all probably been just drunk enough to do anything that came into their minds, and after they got tired of chasing around through the woods without catching me, had given it up and gone back to their celebration.

I had recognized the graveyard as being the one just outside of Godsz. By crossing the road and cutting across some fields I managed to come up in back of the Markows' farmhouse, and to be sure I wasn't seen, I stooped down and followed along the fence till I was close enough to step up to the back door. It was still about an hour till dawn.

I knocked softly on the door. I had to knock again before I heard *Pan* Markow say, 'Who's there?'

'It's Wladek,' I whispered. 'Wladek Stanislow. Let me in.'

He came to the door, and opening it up a crack, peeped out at me. 'Well, it's Wladek!' he exclaimed, opening the door.

'Don't light the lamp or wake up the house,' I murmured; but *Pani* Markow was already in the kitchen, and Sonia was standing behind her; they stood in the doorway rubbing the sleep and surprise out of their eyes.

SZEŚĆ

I TRIED TO TAKE IT EASY AND LIE AROUND IN the hay. But every day the heat would start all over again, making me sweat. Straws would get down my back and itch, and the sweat would make the itchy places burn. The heat would give me a headache, and I would crawl out of the hay and go around looking out of the cracks between the boards, trying to think of something to do. The only thing to do was look out of the cracks. The wind coming through the cracks would be cool on my cheek, but there wasn't anything to see but the sunlight, and the sunlight was turning into the heat which was sticking to me like glue.

Each evening *Pan* Markow would come out to the barn and tell me the news. In the south our forces had united with the Ukrainians and checked the Bolsheviks on the Zbrucz, the Sereth, and the Strypa, but in the north the Russians had already cut Warsaw off from Danzig by occupying Mława. The Bolshevik center drive which had pushed us through Sarny, and crushed us at Ostroff, had advanced to the suburbs of Warsaw.

If this was true, Poland was finished. Warsaw could hold no longer than the food lasted. There was a rumor

that France and England were sending men and supplies to Danzig, but that sounded too much like a dream. It was only a matter of days till the war would be over.

The sun was just going down, and the heat was letting up a little. I went over to the crack I had made so that I could see the back of the house. I put my eye to it, and just then I saw *Pan* Markow come out. I watched him, and he came toward me at a speed that was not like the gait a man ordinarily takes when he is going to his barn. He had not stopped to gaze around as he usually did, to see if he was being watched. As he walked his hands were swinging excitedly at his sides. I watched him till the crack cut me off, and then I went over to the ladder.

He missed a step as he hurried up, and when he saw me, he paused midway up, and it was a second or two before he could pick out the most important thing he had to say.

I stooped down. 'What is the matter?' I asked.

He came on up till his head was above the floor and close to mine; his eyes were bursting with news. 'Our soldiers are coming!' he exclaimed, 'and the Russians are leaving the village!'

'That's too hard to believe,' I said.

'But it's true! The Bolsheviks are leaving the village now. They passed me as I was coming from Szerwony Bór!'

'What does the *soltis* have to say about this?'

'He says it is rumored that the French and English have already landed troops and supplies at Danzig, and that they have broken through to Warsaw!'

This was almost unbelievable news, but I could think of no other explanation for the Bolshevik retreat.

'It must be true, then,' I said.

I made up my mind what I was going to do. I was getting fed up with this hiding and peeping through cracks. If I worked it right, I could follow along in the confusion behind the Russians till I got to Vilna, where a strange face would not start a rumor. And then I decided to tell *Pan* Markow a lie.

'I was just thinking that right now is a good time for me to go and rejoin my comrades,' I remarked.

I hated to deceive him again, but I couldn't see anything else to do. I wasn't telling the same kind of lie I had told him the first time, because this time I was not a deserter. But if I told him why I couldn't rejoin my comrades, that they would think I was a deserter again, I should have to tell him about the first lie, and I didn't want to do that.

'You should know best what to do about these things,' *Pan* Markow replied.

'I had better leave tonight,' I said, and just then Sonia came up the ladder with my supper in a bucket.

'While you are eating,' he told me, 'I will go and tell *Pani* Markow to prepare a bundle of food for you to take along.'

He climbed down the ladder, and Sonia came up and set the food down in front of me.

'I am not very hungry,' I remarked.

'Papa has told you the news?'

'Yes.'

(TWO ALONE)

'What are you going to do?' She knew that I couldn't go back to my comrades.

'I'll have to go somewhere.'

'Where?'

'Vilna, maybe.'

'What will you do then?'

'I'll have to *get* there first.'

She paused. I could see that she was making up her mind. And then she said, 'I'm going with you.'

I didn't know what to say. My heart told me to say Yes, and my conscience was telling me to say No, and I didn't know what to say.

'I am going with you,' Sonia repeated.

I tried to think of some way to say No, but it wouldn't come out that way; there was something strong in me that wouldn't let me say No. We were looking at each other without saying anything. It was a hard thing to decide.

'I will ask them to let you accompany me to the bridge,' I decided, 'and we will make up our minds there.'

SIEDM

I DIDN'T LOOK AT SONIA WHEN WE WERE LEAVING them at the edge of the field. We were standing there, and she couldn't tell them good-bye. And we had to walk away like that.

The moon was bright, and it was slicing through the clouds. After we left them, we went around behind the village, coming up through the woods to the road, and as we were walking I was trying to keep from thinking of what they would begin to think when Sonia didn't come back. We stopped when we came to the bridge, and I set the bundle down. I looked at her and she looked at me, and then I took her in my arms tightly, and kept her there. She was holding me closely, and we were not saying anything.

I brought my hands up to her shoulders and turned her around till she was facing the village. We could see the small yellow window, and the outline of the house. There was some smoke coming out of the chimney.

I said, 'Do you see what I see?'

'Yes,' she replied.

'What do you see?'

'I see my house.'

'Do you want to go back?'

'I am going with you.'

I studied her face as she was looking at me, and then I took my hands down off her shoulders and picked up the bundle.

'Come on,' I commanded.

She was walking at my side and we were going along in the darkness and my heart was full of strength and happiness. We kept on going, breathing easily and stepping along close together, and I knew she was not afraid. I felt as if it would be easy to go over and pull up one of the trees alongside the road.

We had been walking quite a while when I noticed a change in the darkness. We were going through a forest, but that wasn't it. I looked up and saw that the moon had gone behind some fast-moving clouds, and then I heard a rumble of thunder. We looked at each other, knowing it was going to rain.

The wind began pushing us on, and every once in a while there would be a wink of lightning behind the clouds. The drops began falling, and the lightning was stabbing at the clouds and cracking like artillery. The trees were thick on each side of the road.

We went in and found a tree that was low and heavy with leaves. I propped some dead limbs up against its trunk, and by breaking some branches off the other trees and piling them on the dead limbs, I made a good shelter from the wind and the rain. We had not got very wet, and we sat down and listened to the storm coming.

tense. I drew her up closer to me and she eased up on the grip she had on my arm; her fingernails had been biting into my arm like teeth.

‘What is it, Sonia? What are you thinking?’

Just then there was a blast of thunder. A blaze of lightning came down in sharp roots of light that lit up the trees for a second, and she gripped my arm again.

‘It’s just a little thunder and lightning,’ I said.

‘I am not afraid of the storm,’ she explained. ‘This is a bad forest. Many people have been murdered by the bands of thieves and cutthroats who live here.’

‘They won’t prowl around in this storm,’ I assured her.

‘They stay here in the forest and wait for the villagers to return from the market with money in their pockets.’

I patted Sonia on the shoulder. ‘They’re too lazy to get out and get wet,’ I told her. ‘But when it slacks up a little we’ll go on and get out of here before they have a chance to find us.’

We sat there for a long time. The rain was falling on the leaves, making a continuous drenching sound. Once in a while a drop would seep down on us. I took my pocketknife and dug a little trench around us to keep the water from coming in and wetting the ground. The lightning had almost stopped flashing, coming only occasionally in a glowing wink. The thunder was rumbling off in the distance, and the rain was slackening.

‘Let’s eat something before we go,’ I suggested.

Sonia opened the bundle and handed me some cheese and a piece of bread.

I was feeling kind of strange. It was a sort of slow warm excitement in me. It was not the same kind of excitement I had had when I first saw her. This wasn't the same kind of feeling; it was something that was going on inside of me. I was alone with this girl, and I loved her, and I knew she loved me. The way she had been so close to me in my arms had affected me.

'How do you feel, Sonia?'

She shook her hair with her hands. 'My hair is a little damp,' she said, and then she moved over closer to me, putting her hand up to the place on my head. 'Your head is not bandaged. Does it hurt any?'

'It feels all right; but I meant, how do you feel about me?' I could feel her shiver. She put her arm around me, and I kissed her with my arms tight around her. When I tried to talk my voice was hoarse, and I had to let it go.

'We will get married in Vilna,' I said after a while.

The rain had stopped. We left the shelter and found our way to the road, walking carefully through the trees without shaking the water from the branches onto us. The sky had cleared, and as we walked we could see the puddles of water in the road when the lightning flickered.

We were through the forest at dawn. There was a mist hanging over the fields. By the time the sun had melted the mist we came in sight of a village. We left the road and went out through the fields to avoid going through the village. In one of the fields we saw a small barn standing off to itself. It looked like a good place in

which we could rest for a while. There was some straw on the floor and we scraped it together to sit on. I stretched out to enjoy the comfort of resting, and Sonia lay down beside me.

I was trying to think of how it would be in Vilna, and what I would do when we got there. I had about a hundred Russian rubles which Sonia's father had given me until I could get some money from home. He had given me rubles because the Bolsheviks had made him exchange his Polish money for Russian money. I wasn't sure what kind of money they were using in Vilna. It depended on who was in control of the town.

And then I must have gone to sleep, because the next thing I knew I heard Sonia scream. She was pointing at a man running off with our bundle of food.

I got up and ran after him. When I caught up with him I grabbed hold of his neck and pulled him down, and we rolled together on the ground. When we stopped he was on top of me, choking me with both hands. I tore his hands off and got one of my hands under his leg and pushed him over, and we both got up. I saw he was too big for me. He came at me and I swung and ducked under him, but he grabbed me by the neck again. I brought my knee up into his belly. He backed off and I picked up a stick I saw and hit him with it once, and he fell.

I picked up the bundle. Sonia came up and I grabbed her by the hand.

'Let's run,' I said.

We stopped running when we got to some woods and

walked on till we found the road on the other side of the village. The sun was low in the sky, and we walked on till it set.

'We'll have to find a place to stay pretty soon,' I remarked.

'How much money have you got, Wladek?'

'I've got enough to take care of us.'

'You've got Russian money. That's no good.'

I didn't think she would think of that. 'Maybe I can get it exchanged somewhere,' I replied.

It got dark and the stars came out. We came to a large field that had some haystacks in it. Pulling some of the hay off a stack, we made a small pile to get under, because the night was a little chilly. After we had eaten the rest of the food we lay down in the hay and tried to go to sleep. Dogs were barking and answering each other from the farmhouses all around, and in the distance we could hear the sound of cannon, when the wind was strong.

OSM

IT WAS QUIET ALL AROUND US WHEN WE WOKE up. We could feel the wind coming across the field and licking softly on our faces. It was not dawn yet and the stars were high and bright. The wind made a gentle swishing sound as it danced around the haystack. The moon was gone and the dogs we had heard before we went to sleep were not barking any more, but I could hear a lonely rooster crowing off in the distance.

I sat up and looked through the darkness at Sonia; she was beautiful with her hair spread out around her face, and I got over closer and smoothed it out with my hands, while her eyes were calmly looking at me, watching my eyes as I looked at her. We lay there for a while close together, listening to the wind as it played around in the field.

The sky was beginning to get lighter and the cocks were getting louder, with more of them answering each other from different directions. We got up and piled the hay back around the stack and started off along the road, watching the dawn ripen in the sky.

We followed the cobblestoned road till the sun came

out bright enough to see in the distance, and then I noticed that Sonia was lagging behind a little. I slowed up and put my arm around her; I knew she was hungry, because I was too.

The road curved around a line of trees on ahead, and when we got past the trees I saw a village. It looked as if it were deserted, but as we got closer I could see smoke coming out of the chimney of one of the houses, and I made up my mind: Where there is smoke there is food. I am hungry and she is hungry. We have got to have food to live, and I will get it.

Just before we got to the house I told Sonia to step off the road and get behind a clump of bushes, where she would be out of the way but still able to keep me in sight. I went up to the house.

The door was open, but when I started in an old woman stood in the way. I looked at her and she looked at me. There was no fear in her face, but I knew she was afraid of me, because she knew what I wanted. I didn't want to harm her, but I wanted some food. I looked past her into the room and saw a bed and a chair and a table. Over in one corner I saw a clay stove, and there was a black iron pot on it. The old woman was standing there to protect her food, and there was an angry look on her face.

I looked the old woman in the eye and she was staring at me and her face was working and shaking and I knew she did not have much food in the house, but I had to get a little of it for Sonia.

'What do you want?' she asked.

'I want some food for my sister.'

'I have no food to give away.'

'I will pay you for it, but you must let me have something to eat.'

'No. Get out!'

She tried to push me out the door. It would have been easy to knock her senseless, but I didn't think it was necessary. I shoved her to one side and went over to the stove; she was yelling and trying to get up from the floor where she had fallen. I lifted the lid. The pot was full of beautiful brown potatoes. The hot smell of them came right up into my face.

I looked back at the old woman. She was about to get up. I grabbed a handful of potatoes and the old woman got up and swung at me with a stick, hitting me on the shoulder just as I went out the door.

I had the food and I was going over with it to Sonia. She started screaming and pointing behind me, and when I looked around I saw an old man running at me with a pitchfork in his hands. I could see the sharp shining points of it coming at me, and he was coming at me without making a sound, because he wanted to run me through. All I had time to do was drop the potatoes and try to push the prongs to one side, but one of them caught my coat and ripped it.

I couldn't see a thing to use against the old man, there wasn't a stick or anything anywhere, and I had to run away from him, because he was coming at me again. I ran over to Sonia and she grabbed my hand and pulled me on till we were almost out of sight of the house. The

old man had stopped when he got the potatoes back, and I saw him pick them up and go into the house.

We walked on around the village and came to the road again. My hands were still smarting from the hot water that had been in the pot. We were not going very fast, because Sonia's feet were hurting. After a while we sat down in the shade of a tree. I kept thinking of the way that old fellow had looked coming at me with the pitchfork in his hands. He was already aiming with his eyes, and he had it set to get me in the soft part of my back. I had to run out of his way, but I could have gone back after him. All I needed was to get me a nice long stick. I felt badly about having to run away like that.

'What are you thinking about?' Sonia asked.

'They must have been as hungry as we were,' I answered.

'I was afraid he was going to stick you.'

'I didn't see him soon enough. Do your feet hurt much?'

'They will be all right after we have rested awhile.'

She took her shoes off and I began to rub her feet with my hands.

'We will stop at the first stream and bathe them,' I said.

I knew we had to keep on going, because we were between the two armies and both of them had to use the same road. I didn't know how fast the Polish forces were moving up. If the Poles were trying to flank the Bolsheviks we should have to be careful not to get too close to the troops we were following, because they

might decide to swing back along the road in an attempt to counterflank the Polish troops. There are too many things that can happen when you get too close to an army.

We got up to start again, but I happened to look back along the way we had come. I saw something moving. I began to watch it, and pretty soon I could see that it was troops coming toward us.

‘What is it, Wladek?’

‘Troops.’

‘Are they Russian?’

‘I can’t tell yet.’

There were some low bushes stretching away from the road toward the woods, and we crawled through these till we got into the woods. We were far enough away to be safe, but we should be able to see who they were when they passed. It didn’t take them long to get to us, and I saw that they were Bolshevik infantry. They were going along in loose formation and it took them quite a while to pass.

‘They are not in a big hurry,’ I told Sonia, ‘so our forces can’t be too close on their heels.’

I counted about three companies and part of an artillery unit, and I decided that they were using them as a rear guard to protect the retreat of the main force, which should be farther up along the road. This was the same sort of tactics we had used to protect our retreat to Ostroff. Sonia and I waited about an hour after they passed to be sure there weren’t any more troops coming, and then we started out again.

It was late noon by the time we reached another village. I was determined to go right into the village, because this time we were going to get something to eat. We were too hungry to go much farther without eating.

Just as we got to the first house we met a woman carrying a bucket.

'There is milk in the bucket,' Sonia said.

'If she has milk we will have some of it,' I replied.

I went over to the woman and took out the money. 'Here is all my money,' I said. 'Give me some milk for my sister.'

The woman eyed me and looked at the money.

'No,' she answered. 'This milk is for my babies.'

'Give me one cup for my sister.'

'No,' she repeated, and looking at the money she said, 'Tomorrow that money will not be worth a *groszy*!'

She turned and started off along a path that led through some woods. I didn't want to take the milk away from her till she was out of sight of the village. We followed her, just keeping her in sight, and when she came to the edge of the woods she went on out into a field. She was going toward a sort of mound. When she came to it she stopped, and after looking all around to see if she were watched, she reached down and pulled up a door. She stepped down through the opening and closed it after her.

I told Sonia to stay where she was. I went over and raised the door. The place looked as though it were the cellar of what might once have been a house. A candle was burning on a table in the center of the room. I went

down the steps and saw the woman just setting the bucket down. She turned around quickly and recognized me.

I looked around the room and saw an old man sitting in a chair in one corner. There wasn't any danger, so I went back up the steps and motioned to Sonia, and when I came back down I asked, 'Where are the babies?'

She grabbed the bucket and set it down in back of her. 'I did not get this milk for you,' she said.

'All I want is one cup of it for my sister. I am here and I am going to get it.'

I went over close to her and she grabbed a knife off the table and stood with it in her hand in front of the milk. I looked out of the corner of my eye at the old man. He was too feeble to get out of his chair. I made a motion at her with my left hand, and when she struck at it I grabbed her wrist with my right. She changed hands with the knife and I got her wrist just in time to keep the knife away from my chest. I twisted her arm till she dropped the knife on the floor, and then I stepped on it.

I was pushing her out of the way to get the milk when she said, 'Wait, you will spill it.'

I let her go and she lifted the bucket up onto the table. Without a word she went to a shelf and got a cup, dipped it into the milk, and handed it to me. Sonia was looking at the milk; her eyes were staring at it, and when I handed it to her she took it carefully, putting it to her lips and closing her eyes as she drank it in long slow swallows until it was all gone. When she took the cup

down from her lips she looked into it to be sure she had got it all.

I wanted some milk too. There was plenty left in the bucket. I took out the money and held it out to her.

'Here, give me some milk too.'

'I want Polish money,' she demanded.

'If you don't want the money I will take the milk anyway,' I said, and I took the cup from Sonia and dipped it in the milk and drank it without taking my eyes off the woman. I put the money on the table.

Then I took a good look at the woman. Her clothes were ragged and worn, but she looked strong and healthy. She had plenty of flesh on her face and her arms were large and round, and I knew she was getting enough to eat. The old man had plenty of flesh on his bones, and he didn't look hungry. He just looked feeble and unhealthy, and I decided that where two people like this live there must be something to eat.

I picked up the knife and held it in my hand, and then I saw some bread crumbs on the table. I looked at the woman and she saw me look back at her and she knew I had seen the bread crumbs on the table.

'Give us a piece of bread and we will go.'

'There is no more bread. We have already eaten it all.'

I didn't believe her; she was telling a lie as she had done about the milk. I knew she had some bread here somewhere. I looked around the room. There were a lot of places where she could hide bread and I decided to search for it. I wanted Sonia to sit down and rest, so I led her over to the bunk, and just as she sat down on it

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I heard a crunching sound, and then I knew where the bread was. The woman started over toward us and I turned to meet her. She stopped because I still had the knife in my hand.

Sonia got up and pulled the sack of straw back, and there was a large round piece of bread. The woman stood with her eyes full of hate as I cut off a nice piece of bread. There wasn't any use saying anything to her. We had something to eat, and she still had plenty for herself and the old man. I broke off a piece of the bread and gave it to Sonia and we climbed back up the steps, and when I got to the top I threw the knife down and closed the door, and we went back along the path eating the bread.

DZIEWIEĆ

WE DIDN'T PASS ANOTHER VILLAGE ALL DAY long. The road went straight and level along the middle of a wide flat valley, and it was getting dark by the time we came to the end of it. The road crossed over a stream, and we stopped to get a drink and bathe Sonia's feet.

We were in a hurry because we knew we were behind the last Russian forces, but we sat on the bank of the stream and rested, watching the moon come up big and yellow and almost level with us at the other end of the valley.

Sonia was putting on her shoes again. I watched her. She was doing it in a slow, thoughtful way, and when I bent down to help her, she patted my hand and smiled at me, but I could see that she didn't really feel like smiling, because the smile didn't stay on her face long enough. Her face changed back to the tired, serious look again.

'We ought to reach Augustow by tomorrow night,' I said, and she smiled at me again, but her face ended up with the same weary expression.

We started off along the road. I wanted to say some-

thing to cheer her up, but I couldn't think of anything to say. I couldn't say anything because I didn't have the heart to talk about something that I knew was so far away, and I knew that if I said anything my voice would not be convincing.

'I know what you are thinking,' Sonia said. Her voice was nice and soft and kind as her smile had been, and then she said: 'We shall get to Vilna. I know we shall,' and all I could do was pat her on the shoulder, because I couldn't trust my voice to say anything.

We kept on along the road, following it through the trees in the dark. I wanted to put my arm around her, but I knew it would be easier walking for both of us if I didn't, and we kept on going till the sun came up. During the night the cobblestoned surface of the road had ended, changing to a sandy, gray rutted road.

I was really getting hungry; my stomach was yearning for food, and I knew it was the same with Sonia. I could feel the weakness while we were walking. Our pace was slower, but we couldn't help it. We kept looking ahead for the sight of a house, but all we could see was trees and bushes, and the road we were walking on.

We stopped to rest where a road came in to join the one we were following. It was a dirt road with deep ruts in it that had been freshly made by heavy wagons, and we could see that they had continued on in the direction we were going. I knew they were not farmers' wagons because of the wide deep tracks made by the wheels, and after we had gone on farther along the road we came to another junction, and there were the same

kind of tracks on it. After a while we began seeing discarded ammunition boxes, worn-out pieces of uniforms, empty cans, and broken wheels that the Bolsheviks had left behind as they moved along ahead of us.

We walked all day long, stopping occasionally to rest. The sun went down and the day faded into darkness, and we knew we had to find something to eat pretty soon. The trees began to thin out, with wild brushy fields taking their place.

The road went up a long hill, and when we got to the top we could see a lot of lights scattered around and stretching out below the bottom of the hill, and we knew it was Augustow.

We started walking a little faster with the aid of going downhill. Just before we got to the bottom we came to a long line of wagons standing in the road. There were no horses hitched to them.

'We can't go into the town,' I said. 'The Bolsheviks are camped here, and they will be all over everywhere.'

We turned off through a field and went through the darkness, bumping into trees and falling down into ditches and getting up and going on again till we knew we were near the other end of the town. When we hit the main road we followed it back till we came to a house that had a large fruit garden on one side of it. The house was dark. We climbed through the loose boards of the fence without making a sound and got inside where the fruit trees were, lying down in the tall grass to listen.

'Wait here,' I whispered.

I crawled over to a tree. Looking up into it I could see that there were apples on it. I couldn't reach them from the ground, so I climbed up into the branches. As I picked them off I put them inside my shirt, and then I went back to Sonia.

'I have apples!'

I handed her one out of my shirt and she bit into it. I could see her eating it fast, chewing and swallowing and biting deep into it again to get another mouthful, and I was doing the same thing. They were green winter apples, but it didn't make any difference, we ate all we could hold, and then, when we couldn't eat any more we lay down, and it didn't take us long to go to sleep.

It was still dark when we woke up. We crawled back out of the garden and went along the road eating the apples we had left.

The road had changed back to cobblestones at Augustow. By the time the sun was up we had already got out of sight of the town. We came to another forest, but the road went along the side of it. The trees were large and there was a heavy growth of vines along the ground. A grassy marsh lay along the other side of the road.

I heard a sudden booming sound, and when we stopped to listen I heard it again, coming from the direction of Augustow. The booming increased, and then I heard the fainter, higher-pitched reply of the Polish field guns.

'What is that?' Sonia asked.

'Our forces have made contact with the Bolsheviks,' I explained.

I had been waiting for the wagons we had seen the

night before to catch up with us, and now, since they hadn't, I knew they were making a stand.

'We had better keep going,' I said. 'Do your feet still hurt?'

'The rest last night helped a lot. They'll be all right.'

We followed the road till the sun was straight up overhead, and then we stopped under the trees to rest. I went on into the forest to see if I could find some wild berries, but there weren't any. When I came back we started out again. Sonia looked kind of pale, but I thought it was the bright sunlight. We had hardly gone a hundred yards when I heard a rumbling sound behind us, and looking back, I saw it was the wagons we had seen in Augustow. The only thing we could do was get off the road and go a little way into the forest. It was hard going, but it was safer.

The sound of the wagons passing was like thunder. We were trying to go along parallel to the road through the tangled vines. I was going ahead, trying to make a passage for Sonia, and just when I happened to look back she fell down. When she didn't get up I stopped and went back. She was lying on her side. Her face was white and her eyes were closed, and I thought she was dead.

Something started blasting inside my head. A strange feeling came over me, and I began yelling at her to make her hear me above the roar out on the road, but she just lay there with her eyes closed. I was shaking all over. I didn't know what was the matter with her, and I

didn't know what to do. I put my head down on her breast to see if her heart was beating, and then I got up and tried to run into the forest to find some water to put on her face. I was too weak to run. The vines caught my feet and made me fall and I had to force myself to get up and go on, and finally I got to a slimy green pool of water. When I dipped my hands into it I saw that the water was full of bugs and worms, but I got a double handful of the stuff and got back with some of it and threw it in her face and went back after some more and came back and threw it in her face, and she was still white-faced with her eyes closed.

I got down on my knees beside her and tried to open her eyes, but my head started going around and I couldn't see what I was doing, and then I felt myself falling over, and everything seemed to fade away.

Wladek was up ahead of me and I was trying to tell him to come back and help me. I fell down and then I heard him yelling at me, but I couldn't move my lips. That was the last thing I knew until I woke up and heard the noise coming from the road.

I managed to sit up, and when I did I saw Wladek lying down in front of me with his eyes closed. I thought he was asleep. But when I crawled over and shook him he didn't wake up, and then I thought he was dead. His hands were clasped together as though he were praying and his face was almost green. I started kissing him and screaming for him to wake up, but he just lay there with his eyes closed. I shook him again

and his head rolled from side to side loosely on his shoulders.

I tried to lift him up, but he was too heavy, and then I looked around to see if I could see any water. All I could see was trees and vines. I went on into the woods and found a little muddy pool of water and knelt down and dipped the hem of my dress in it and went back to him and stuck my fingers in between his teeth and squeezed some of the water into his mouth. I went back to the pool and dipped my dress in again and came back and squeezed a little more into his mouth, and then I started shaking him.

I kissed him again, and when I looked at his face I saw his eyes flicker, and then they opened up wide. He looked at me, but he didn't recognize me and I said, 'Wladek, it's me, Sonia,' and then he said, 'I feel better now.'

I raised him up and put my arms around him. The color began coming back into his face and we sat there for a while. I was too weak to say anything, and finally he got up on his knees and looked around and we put our arms around each other and tried to go on again.

We weren't making much progress because the trees were always in our way and the vines were always tangling up our feet, but we kept on, keeping the road in sight as we pushed forward. I looked ahead of us and saw that we were coming to the edge of a steep bank, and looking over at the road I saw a long narrow wooden bridge that was going over the swamp. The wagons

were thundering across it, their wheels bumping up against the railings and knocking the boards off into the mud below. We went up along the edge of the bank and sat down behind some bushes close to the end of the bridge.

An artillery unit was passing. A caisson broke loose from one of the guns and bounced off into the swamp, and in the wake of the guns a flood of cavalry galloped past. Small groups of infantry were coming up and crowding around the entrance to the bridge. They couldn't get across because the wagons were still going past. A bunch of them got on the bridge and started across and a wagon came along and ran into them. When the driver tried to miss the men he hit the railing, breaking through it. The wagon plunged off into the swamp; the horses were screaming and struggling in the mud. Some of the men that had been knocked off the bridge into the mud were trying to climb back, but most of them were sinking down like the horses, screaming for help with no one paying any attention to them.

More men were coming up all the time. I could hear the sound of rifles popping in the rear. Finally the wagons stopped coming and the infantrymen began crowding across the bridge. Officers with swords in their hands were urging them on. Bullets were whizzing by.

I knew we had to get across, because the Russians would naturally make a stand on the other side of the swamp. We went up to the mouth of the bridge, and just as we were about to start across Sonia fell down. When

I tried to lift her up I saw some blood on her shoulder. When I saw this I went *szalony*. I tried to grab the rifle away from one of the Bolsheviks, and then something hit me on the back of my head.

When I came to I was lying on the side of the road. I was too dizzy to stand up, but I got up on one knee and stayed there until I could see straight, and when I looked for Sonia she was gone. I looked all around and I couldn't see her anywhere.

I got up and went over to the bridge. The Russians were still streaming past, and I grabbed one of them by the arm.

'Where is she?' I shouted.

He jerked loose and shoved me away from him, and then I realized that it wasn't any use asking anybody where she was. If she wasn't here she must be somewhere on the other side of the bridge, and I got up and started across to find her.

Something pinched me on the shoulder and I fell down. Wladek was trying to lift me up, and the next thing I knew I woke up lying on some sacks of grain in an open wagon. The driver had his back to me. We were passing some Russian soldiers, but nowhere could I see Wladek.

I tried to sit up and the pain in my shoulder must have caused me to cry out, because the driver turned around and said something. I couldn't understand because of the noise of the wagon. He was an old man with a mustache. He took the pipe out of his mouth and

pointed back behind me, and when I looked back I saw a young Russian officer riding along in back of the wagon on a horse. He motioned for the driver to stop the wagon; when we stopped he rode up and said:

‘At last you are awake. How do you feel?’

I spoke to him in Russian. ‘Why am I here? And where is my brother?’

‘I have seen no one who claims to be your brother,’ he replied.

I could see that he did not know, or else did not want to tell me anything about Wladek, so I asked him how it was that I had got on this wagon, and he explained that he had seen me lying on the side of the road by the end of the bridge, and had stopped the wagon and put me on it.

‘But my brother was back there too,’ I said.

‘There were a lot of men back there,’ he answered, ‘and none of them said he was your brother.’

The wagons were piling up behind. He motioned for the driver to go on.

‘Take good care of her,’ he ordered as he rode on ahead.

The old soldier looked back at me and grinned. ‘Are you hungry?’ he asked.

‘I should like to have a drink of water.’

He took his canteen off and handed it to me. When I reached for it I felt the pain in my shoulder again, and when I looked down I saw it was bandaged up.

‘What is the matter with my shoulder?’ I inquired.

‘You were wounded.’

I reached the water with my left hand, and after I handed the canteen back, he took a piece of bread out of his pocket and handed it to me.

'What are they going to do with me?'

'I don't know.'

'How long have we been riding?'

'All night.'

'All night! I thought this was dusk.'

'It's dawn,' he laughed, and turned around to whip up his horses.

The sun came out hot. We kept going all day long through neglected cornfields that had grown high with weeds. I thought of getting off the wagon, but I knew I couldn't last long in such a deserted countryside. Every house we passed was burned to the ground.

It was almost dark when I looked up ahead and saw them turning the wagons off into a big level field. They were making a large circle with them. My driver pulled his wagon up outside the circle where some soldiers had just put up a tent.

The old man climbed down off the wagon and went over and said something to the soldiers. They looked at me and nodded their heads. When he came back over to the wagon he directed, 'You stay here with the wagon while I take care of my horses.'

I sat on the wagon and watched them building fires inside the circle. Some of them were hanging small pots over the flames to make tea.

Darkness was settling over the camp. I had got down off the wagon and was starting to go back to the road

when someone behind me said: 'Wait. Where are you going?'

It was the officer. He was just coming from behind one of the wagons.

'Nowhere,' I replied. 'I was just stretching my legs.'

I could see that he didn't believe me. He came over closer, and it seemed that his eyes were tracing lines all over me.

'We will get something to eat for you pretty soon,' he said.

'I am not very hungry,' I replied, but he didn't seem to hear me.

'Come on,' he ordered. 'I will show you where you will stay,' and he led me over to the tent. The soldiers were looking at me without paying any attention to what they were doing.

'Go back to your places,' he told them, and they moved off toward the wagons.

The old Bolshevik came up with two blankets and put them in the tent.

'Good night,' he said.

'Where are you going?'

'I have to tend to my horses.'

'Are you coming back?'

'I have to eat my supper too.' He was grinning and tipping his cap and walking away.

There were two Bolsheviks standing by the door of the tent with rifles in their hands. I felt like screaming at them because of the way their eyes were watching me, but I sat down on some sacks of grain that were piled by

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the side of the tent. When the officer came back he had a cup of tea and a piece of bread in his hands. Sitting down beside me, he nodded at the two soldiers and they moved off toward the wagons. He handed me the bread and tea.

'We will have stew after a while,' he said.

He was sitting too close to me, but I didn't want to let him know I was afraid.

'Thank you,' I said.

He started questioning me.

'Where were you and your brother going?'

'To Vilna.'

'Why were you going there?'

'That's where we live.'

I could see that he wasn't interested in what I would tell him, because he would ask a second question before I was through answering the first. I moved away from him a little.

'Are you afraid of me?'

'No.'

'Why did you move away?'

'It's more comfortable over here.'

'Is that right?' he said, and moved over closer.

Just then another officer came up out of the darkness. He was a commissar. He was tall and stout and had a beard. At first he didn't see me, and then he said, 'Oh, we have company!' and then the young officer stood up and said, 'Yes.'

They were both looking at each other without saying anything. Then the Commissar suggested, 'You ought

to go and see that the horses are fed properly, Ivan, don't you think?'

The young officer stood up a little straighter. 'The men do not need my help.'

'Maybe they do.'

'No.'

The Commissar went up to him. 'Do you disregard my command?'

'Yes,' he replied in a hissing sort of way, and I could see both of them stiffen, and their eyes were measuring each other.

I didn't get a chance to see how badly she was wounded. But she couldn't be dead, because if she were she would still be at the other end of the bridge where she got shot. She had to be up along the road somewhere. A lot of things were going through my head, but I wouldn't let myself think of them.

I kept on pushing the fellow in front of me and he kept on pushing the fellow in front of him, and we were all straining forward. I was among them, and we were all trying like hell to get across. They weren't paying any attention to anything except themselves and the hell of a hurry they were in. One of them fell down and he was trying to get up and we were walking over him. When we got near the other end of the bridge we were almost running.

The road turned to the left and went along parallel to the swamp at this end of the bridge, and the woods that came up to the edge of the swamp made a natural defense

for them. I walked back into the woods where they were setting up the guns. They were all running around trying to find something to hide behind, and after I got out of sight I turned back toward the road. I knew I had to follow it if I wanted to find Sonia.

When I got to the road the Bolshevik artillery was beginning to open up. It was just getting dusk and the last of the wagons were coming along. I waited behind a tall bush till the last wagon came up, and when it passed I reached up and grabbed hold of the tailgate. The sacks of grain were piled high enough to keep the driver from seeing my hands, and I held on and let the wagon pull me along. Once in a while he would whip up the horses to catch up with the wagon ahead of him, and I had to let my feet drag, because I couldn't move my legs that fast.

It kept up this way for a long time after it got dark. I was about ready to let go. My hands and arms were aching, and my feet were beginning to drag on the cobblestones most of the time. And then I felt the wagon turning off the road. We went through a line of trees and down an incline into a field.

Just as the wagon was about to stop, someone rode past on a horse. I heard him slow up and turn around. He came up behind the wagon and called, 'Halt!'

The driver stopped the wagon. It was all I could do to turn around. I had to lean against the tailgate to stand up.

'What are you doing here?' the man shouted. He had his pistol aimed at me.

I didn't say anything. My Russian wasn't good enough to deceive him. When I didn't reply he moved his horse over, and grabbing the back of my coat, he marched me along by the side of his horse till we came up to a tent where two Bolsheviks were standing in front of a small fire.

'Take charge of this prisoner,' he told them. When he let go of my coat to dismount I fell down on the ground. He went on into the tent. I heard him talking to someone, and then he came back out and got on his horse and rode off.

A tall hawk-nosed man came out of the tent. He was a commissar. I sat up. He was looking down at me. His hat was off, and his hair came down and hid part of his face.

'What are you doing here?'

'I am trying to get to Vilna.'

'How far back are the Poles?'

'I don't know.'

He kicked me.

'Where are the French?'

'I don't know.'

He flew into a rage. 'Bah! you are lying!' he shouted. 'We will see if you can speak the truth!'

He went back into the tent and came out with a short thonged whip in his hand.

'Stand up and take off your coat,' he commanded.

It was all I could do to get to my feet, and while I was taking my coat off he began whipping me. I had to shield my face with my hands, and then he changed to

my shoulders, and I couldn't help groaning with the pain of it. When he got through he was out of breath, and he had to wait awhile before he could say anything.

'Now speak!' he shouted. 'Answer my questions.'

My lips were bleeding and so swollen that I could not form any words. All I could do was stand and look at him. He came up and gave me a push that sent me to the ground. He was shaking with anger.

'In the morning you will be the first Pole to face the firing squad!' He turned to the two guards. 'Take him away!'

They took me back up among the trees. There were a lot of Bolsheviks lying around on the ground. Most of them were asleep. I was still quivering all over from the whipping, and my heart was full of hate. One of the men brought me a cup of tea and a piece of bread. It was painful to eat it, and when I had finished, they sat me down by a tall sapling and tied my hands behind the tree. I was thinking of what might be happening to Sonia. The thought was stinging in my head, and the rage I felt was brewing the tears that were coming in my eyes. I looked up at the dark sky and wondered if God was looking down and laughing at me.

The small fires began dying down and the camp was so quiet that I could hear the wind in the trees, and once in a while I could hear the faint sound of cannon, and I knew they were still holding the bridge. There was about a company of men here, and this made me believe that the main force was still farther up along the road, because I had seen how many had crossed the bridge.

I must have gone to sleep, because something hit me in the side, and when I opened my eyes I saw the Commissar standing in front of me. It was daylight. They were breaking camp in a hurry. The wagons were wheeling back up to the road. They were all chasing around, getting ready to move.

The Commissar kicked me again while they were untying me. My arms were stiff, and I was rubbing my wrists to get the feeling back into my hands. The sound of rifle fire was coming from across the field. I got to my feet.

'Get in front of that tree!' the Commissar shouted.

I didn't move fast enough for him and he gave me a shove. I found myself on the ground. I stood up again. He was having trouble getting the firing squad ready. Most of the fellows were going up toward the road without paying any attention to him. And then I saw why. Polish soldiers were just coming out of the woods that were on the other side of the field — a flank attack. They had gone around the swamp and were now coming up from the side. They were firing on us, and the bullets were zipping over our heads in the trees.

Finally the Commissar got six of them lined up with their rifles ready. I was standing in front of the tree. Someone was wrapping a rope around me, and they were waiting for him to finish. I heard a new burst of firing coming from the left, along the line of trees. They were close enough to be accurate, because one of the firing squad fell down. When the others saw him fall they broke ranks and started running toward the road, with

the Commissar shouting at them to come back. They kept on going. Whipping out his pistol, he started running up at me, but something hit him and twisted him around, and he fell right at my feet. At first I thought he had stumbled, but when he didn't get up I knew he was hit. The rope was loose and I got it off my chest and started running through the trees. When I came to the road I could see that they were crowding behind it, using the way it was banked up to protect them. When I looked back I saw the gray uniforms of the attacking party scattering out among the trees. I went on up farther, and getting across the road, I walked below the other side of the bank till the road turned out of sight of the skirmish. When I couldn't hear the firing any more I got back on the road.

The road lay through a farming district. All the houses were burned to the ground and the cornfields were grown up with weeds. A few stalks of corn were still standing in one field. I pulled off some of the small worm-eaten ears and chewed the dry kernels as I walked along.

It was late in the afternoon when I came to a fork in the road. Both roads were paved with cobblestones. I knew if I took the wrong fork I should never find Sonia. The retreating forces could have gone either way. I had an impulse to take the one that went straight on ahead, and when I had gone along it for a while I still had the same feeling, so I stopped worrying.

It had got dark and I had not yet passed a village. The road started curving to the right, and then I saw a lot of

small fires in a big circle of wagons out in a field. It was a big camp. I could see them moving about, and I knew that if Sonia were anywhere, she had to be here. I got off the road. The good thing about going toward a fire is that you can see where you are going, while the ones close to the fire can't see you.

I wanted to get me a Bolshevik uniform. To do that I had to find one of them alone. I crawled up to a row of wagons that were not in the circle. On top of the first one I saw two men. They were asleep, but I had to find one man by himself. I crawled along till I came to the last wagon. I saw a Bolshevik under it. He was sleeping, but when I looked up on top of the wagon I saw another one there. He looked as though he were asleep too.

I looked around and found a nice-sized rock and put it in my hand. I had to get this *człowiek's* clothes without making any noise. When I got up close to him I could hear him breathing. He was lying on his side. I raised the rock up and let it come down on the side of his head. It crunched and he moved a little and I began choking him, but I saw I didn't have to. He wasn't breathing any more. He was limp all over.

I took his coat off first to keep the blood from getting on it. I stripped off his pants and boots. Taking his cap, I crawled off till I was far enough away to be safe, and then I changed clothes.

I walked in through the circle of wagons. A lot of the men were asleep, but some of them were sitting around the fires, laughing and talking. The light from

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the flames played on their faces. One of the wounded was moaning. I went past all the fires. Sonia was not there.

Going back outside of the wagons, I stumbled over one of the men, and he cursed me for waking him up. I passed another wagon that was not in the circle. Two horses were tied to it, but there was no one on it. After I had gone almost all the way around the circle I saw a fire in front of a tent that was off by itself. A wagon was standing close to it, and I crawled up till I was under the wagon. I could see that something was happening, but at first I couldn't figure out what they were doing. It looked as if they were dancing. They moved in closer to the fire, and I could see that it was two men fighting. Just then one of them fell down and stayed there.

I was about to go on when I saw the other one go over toward the tent. I heard a scream, and I saw it was Sonia. She was running right toward me. This *człowiek* caught up with her just before she got past the wagon, and he had hold of her. I crawled out and yanked him around and hit him hard in the face. When he fell I jumped on him with my boots, and then I got down and hit him again, and I knew he was out.

I got up and looked at Sonia. She was standing there with her hands covering her face, and when I took them down she recognized me. I didn't have time to say anything. I grabbed her by the hand and we ran off through the field till we came to the road.

DZIESIEĆ

WE CAME TO SOME TALL BUSHES JUST BEFORE we got to the road. And then I had an idea.

‘Wait a minute, Sonia.’

She didn’t want to stop, but I had hold of her hand.

‘Wait, Sonia. I’m going to get us a horse.’

‘Wladek!’ she gasped. ‘Let’s go on. They will catch us!’

‘I can’t go much farther on my own feet tonight, Sonia.’

She came up close, her eyes searching over me.

‘Are you hurt, Wladek?’

‘I’ll tell you about it later,’ I said. ‘You wait here in these bushes.’ I looked at her. ‘Are you afraid?’

‘No.’

‘I’ll be right back,’ I promised.

I didn’t like to take the chance of leaving her alone, but I couldn’t see any safer way to do it. I went back toward the camp. All the horses were tied to the wagons, but they were on the inside of the circle. I came to the wagon that had been standing by itself outside of

the curving line of wagons. The two horses were still there. One was gray and the other was black. The black one swung his head over toward me when I came up to him. I patted him on the nose. I ran my hand over his shoulder and smoothed him a little, and I could tell he would be all right.

He was tethered to the wagon by a short rope attached to the halter. While I was whispering to him I untied the rope from the corner post of the wagon, pulled him around gently, and started leading him deeper into the field. He followed along with his head over my shoulder, his breath coming across my cheek. The strong animal smell of him and the soft, sure sound of his hoofs pushing upon the ground made me feel good. I guided him along in the darkness in a wide circle toward the bushes.

Sonia heard us coming and came out and put her arms around his neck.

'Oh, Wladek, a horse!' she whispered.

I jumped up on him and swung my legs up and straddled him. It felt good to have a horse between my legs.

'Catch hold of my hand, Sonia.'

'Wait, you'll hurt my shoulder.'

'Look, there is a stump,' I said. 'Climb up on it and you can make it.'

I moved the horse over to the stump and Sonia climbed up behind. She put one arm around me and we started off at a slow walk along the side of the road on the soft ground.

When we got out of sight of the camp I pulled the

horse up on the road and put him into a gallop. Sonia tightened her arm around my stomach. I could feel her face up close to the back of my head. The wind was coming into our faces and we were riding along together through the night.

I spoke to Sonia: 'I shouldn't have grabbed that fellow's rifle. I went *szalony*. I thought it was a Bolshevik that shot you. Have they harmed you, Sonia? Did they mistreat you?'

'They were too busy retreating at first. But I knew they were up to something when we stopped. One of the men wouldn't go away. That's why they were fighting when you got there.'

'Sonia, I — I ——'

'Yes, Wladek?'

'Well, I — I want to say. I mean if anything happens to you like that — I mean it's all my fault. Do you know what I mean, Sonia?'

She patted me on the shoulder. 'We are together again, Wladek.'

My heart was too big inside of me. I couldn't say anything else about it. I slowed the horse down. He was carrying double and I didn't want to hurt him.

I felt Sonia jump suddenly.

'Wladek, do you hear it?' she asked.

'What?'

I pulled the horse up and listened. It was the sound of horses running. They were coming from behind us.

'Are they coming this way?'

'I can't tell,' I replied.

There was a swamp on the left side of the road. The field on the right looked level. I turned off into it and brought the horse up to a gallop again. I knew they would catch us sooner or later, but I thought maybe we could find something to hide behind farther up the road. The ground began getting rougher. Once in a while the horse stumbled and missed his pace. I halted him to let him rest, and to listen. They were much nearer, but we couldn't see them yet. Up ahead, along the side of the road, I could see a narrow strip of trees, but they were almost a mile away.

We started off again. I left the halter rope slack and Sonia was nudging the horse's flanks. He was carrying us as fast as he could go. Suddenly he pitched forward, and the next thing I knew I hit the ground. I couldn't do anything for a minute or two because of the jolt. Finally I sat up and looked around and saw Sonia sitting up too.

I was in front of the horse. I got up and went over to him. He was lying on his belly with his forelegs hanging down in a narrow shallow ditch. Then I saw it. Both of his shins were crooked. He was grunting and breathing hard and shaking his head. Sonia came up to look and we straightened out his forelegs so that they didn't hang in the ditch. The sounds he was making were sticking like pins into my heart.

'I wish I could shoot him,' I told Sonia.

She was bending over him, stroking his head. I had the awful feeling of knowing that the horse was suffering, and that I had caused it.

'You poor horse!' Sonia was saying. 'Oh, you poor horse!'

I saw him prick up his ears and swing his head around toward the road, and I knew we had to do something in a hurry. We were about a hundred yards in from the road, and the grass wasn't tall enough to hide us.

Sonia grabbed my arm. 'Quick, Wladek! We must hurry.'

The trees were too far away.

'They would see us running, Sonia.'

The moon had just slid out from behind the clouds and it was easy to see in all directions. They would be able to see the horse from the road. We had to find some way to hide him. Then I got an idea. We began pulling up the dry grass and piling it on the horse. The grass was dead and brittle, and easy to twist off at the roots, and we had him covered well enough before they came in sight.

I got down behind him, holding his mouth tight in the crook of my arm. My other hand was covering his nostrils without being tight enough to keep him from breathing.

Sonia was lying in the ditch, holding his tail so that he wouldn't swish the grass off. I could see them as they came up. There were six of them, riding together in a loose group, their faces pale in the moonlight. They were going along with their eyes roving each side of the road. When they were even with us I could see the sparks made by the horses' shoes on the cobblestones.

We lay there like that till they had passed out of sight,

and then we got up and took the grass off the horse, so someone would see him in the morning, and shoot him.

I took Sonia by the hand and we went through the field toward the belt of trees that were up ahead along the side of the road. I was feeling rotten about the horse. I was trying to explain to myself that I wouldn't have run him in the dark like that through the field if they had not been chasing us. A fine thing like a horse has to be ruined because we had to be in a hurry to save our lives. Sonia put her arm around me and we stopped and held each other close for a while. We were standing there in the field in the moonlight. I kissed her even though there was pain in my lips when I did it.

'I had to run him, Sonia, and we couldn't stay on the road.'

She nodded her head. 'He was a fine horse.'

'Did it hurt your shoulder?'

'Not much.'

'We had better get to those trees before they come back this way,' I suggested.

We started on.

'That must have been a Polish bullet that hit you, Sonia.'

'What happened to you after I got hit?'

'I tried to grab a Bolshevik's rifle, and then someone hit me on the head. When I woke up, you were gone.'

'Wladek,' she said, putting her hand on my shoulder, and the sound of her voice made me put my arm around her.

We came to the trees. They were short and bushy, and

we had to stoop down to get through them at first. Then we came to some woods that were so full of vines that we had to walk on the road.

After a while we heard them coming back. They were not coming very fast, and we had time to get into the woods before they got to us. I counted them to be sure it was the same party. We waited till we couldn't hear them any more, and then we went back out to the road. The ride on the horse had rested me, but I was getting tired again.

In about an hour we came to the end of the woods, where a dirt road forked off to the left. There was a signpost standing by the side of the road. I raised myself up and read it. The village of Wódowa was two miles away in the direction the dirt road was going.

'The people will still be up,' I told Sonia. 'We will go there and get something to eat, and maybe a place to sleep.'

'They will take you for a Bolshevik.'

'The Russians are still in control here.'

When we came to the village we could see only one house that had a light in it. Where there was a light there were people, and where there were people there was food. The house was sitting off to itself in the middle of a cultivated field. We walked over the plowed-up ground, coming up in back of the house. It was a large white house, with a white fence around it. We passed through a small wooden gate. I knocked on the door.

A man's voice shouted, 'Who is there?'

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I didn't say anything. I wanted him to open the door first. I knocked again. The door opened. A tall man with a gray mustache drooping down around the corners of his mouth stood in the doorway. He looked at us as if he had expected to see someone else. He was eyeing us suspiciously. I didn't give him a chance to close the door. I walked in past him and Sonia followed me.

There was an open door to the left, and a closed one straight ahead. On the right was a long table with a bench along the side of it. Through the doorway on the left I saw a huge clay oven. A clay stove stood by the side of the oven. 'A kitchen has food in it. This man has a large house, and there is always food in a large house,' I was thinking.

He was still standing by the door, and there was an unpleasant look on his face. A woman came out of the kitchen.

I spoke to the man. We are hungry. We want something to eat.'

'Can you pay?'

'No.'

He didn't hesitate. He waved his hand at the door. 'Get out,' he said emphatically. 'Get out of here.'

I didn't move. Sonia came over beside me. The man made out as though he were about to come over toward me, but his wife went over to him.

'Wait, Pavlow,' she told him. 'We can give them something to eat.'

He shook her hand off. 'I can't fill the guts of every beggar I see.' His voice was as insulting as his words.

I looked at him, and I could see that he was waiting for me to start begging. He wanted me to crawl up and get it. I made up my mind. I didn't know whether I could whip him, but I was willing to try it. I walked up to him.

'Are you going to give us food?'

'No!' He spoke in a loud voice. But he moved back a little, and then I knew he was *bojacy*. A loud voice does not allow a man to back up, and when he does, you don't have to listen to his voice. I doubled up my fists and started moving toward him, but before I had a chance to do anything, he turned away and spoke to his wife.

'All right, give them something to eat. Give them the whole house!' He flung his hand up in an assumed angry gesture, as though he were really a very mad, but very generous person.

The man's wife went into the kitchen. Sonia followed her. I was still watching him, and when he started to go toward the door that was closed, I crossed over and stood in his way. I didn't want him out of my sight. He had just enough courage to be treacherous. He went over to the table and sat down on the bench and watched me.

Sonia came in and handed me a plate with some potatoes and meat and bread on it. I stood in the middle of the room and ate it. I wanted to stay between the man and the door. I could feel the hot food going down into me, and the good feeling of eating was all over me. Sonia came back with a steaming cup of tea, and I held it in my hands while I was drinking it, and she was looking

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at me and taking a sip out of her cup and I was proud of her because she was smiling at me. I knew she was not hungry any more. I was happy. We were looking at each other, knowing that our stomachs were full and we were together.

JEDENAŚCIO

THE MOON WAS BRIGHT ENOUGH TO MAKE OUR shadows on the ground. We were cutting across the fields to get back to the main road. It was shorter this way, but we had something else in mind: we wanted to find a haystack. We had been tired and hungry, and now that we were not hungry any more, we were sleepy.

'We had a nice meal,' I asserted.

'Vilna is not so far away now,' Sonia replied.

'If I could have trusted that fellow, I would have made him let us stay there all night.'

Sonia took hold of my hand. She was walking along with her head in the air. I could feel the graceful movements of her body.

'How long have we been, Wladek? Was it yesterday when we started?' Her voice was soft and dreamy, and her eyes were on the stars.

I couldn't remember. I tried to count on my fingers. 'It's five or six days,' I said.

'What day is it?'

'It must be Tuesday, or Wednesday. I'm not sure which.'

She stopped and looked at me, and put her hand up to smooth out my hair. I drew her close to me. Her eyes were dark in the moonlight and her cheek was warm and she was close to me.

'What makes you so beautiful?' I asked.

'The moon must be playing a violin,' Sonia answered. 'Do you hear it, Wladek?'

'The moon's violin is not as soft and sweet as your face,' I said.

We started off again.

'How is your shoulder? Does it hurt?'

'It will be well by the time your head heals up.'

'We are lucky that our feet are not hurt,' I remarked.

'Do you think the Bolsheviks will be on the road tomorrow?'

'It depends on whether the Polish forces have got across the bridge.'

We crossed a ditch that divided two fields.

'Poland is going to push them back into Russia. You will see.'

'Poland is a wonderful country. If we didn't have to fight all the time we should be a great country. Everybody wants part of Poland.'

'I was just thinking of something.'

'What was it?'

'Maybe, after this time, the Poles will not have to fight any more. Maybe they will get tired of invading us.'

'Maybe,' I said.

The night was warm and the wind was soft on our

faces. We went along in the gently swelling field, walking together in the wide silence of the night.

'Some day I will make you happy, Sonia.'

'I am happy now.'

'I mean in a different way. I will work for you, and you will have a nice white house to live in.'

'Shall we have a cow?'

'Hundreds of them.'

'Every day I will cook the things you like; a big pot of *kapusta*, and mashed potatoes with sour cream, and oh, how would you like some *kura rosól z golky*, like what we had at home!'

'The barnyard will be full of chickens,' I said.

We had passed a large haystack before I noticed it.

'Look,' I remarked. 'A nice bed to sleep in!'

'Oh, is it that time already?' She yawned, as if in surprise.

'Don't forget to put the cat out,' I laughed.

It was daylight when Sonia woke me up. She was sitting beside me, braiding her hair. Half of it was hanging loosely down her shoulders, soft, silky, and golden in the sunlight. It was wonderful to watch her, the way she moved her hands, the way her eyes looked up at the morning sky as her fingers went about their task.

'Good morning, Sonitszka!' I called.

'Such a sleepyhead!' she replied.

I watched her till she finished her hair. She curled the long braids around her head and put the *busteczka* back on.

'Why don't you get up and eat breakfast?' she asked.

I sat up. She was holding something behind her.

'How long have you been up? And what have you been up to?'

Her eyes were dancing. I could hardly wait to see what it was she had.

'Are you hungry?' she asked.

I looked around. 'Hay is for cattle.'

'Well, see if you can eat these!' And she handed me two ripe pears.

'*Dziękuję!*' I exclaimed; 'and where did you find these?'

'Shhh,' she whispered. 'There is a farmhouse behind the hill over yonder where the trees are. I woke up early, and when I saw you sleeping so soundly I went over to see what was on the trees. So I brought two pears back for you!'

'Are there more of them?'

'There were just four.'

'We shall have to put in a complaint to the government,' I said.

'The farmer will put a pitchfork into us if we do not hurry,' Sonia replied.

We scraped the hay back around the stack and started off to find the road. The sun came down warm upon us out of the wide blue sky. We were walking over a series of rolling treeless hills that were covered with short yellow grass. In each valley we would go through a patch of tall slender trees that were thick with leaves fluttering in the wind. Then the hills leveled out, and we came to some woods.

I knew the road couldn't be much farther away, and after we had been going through the woods only a few minutes, we caught sight of a small group of Bolsheviks. They were going along the road without any kind of formation. It was a bunch of stragglers. Most of them were without rifles, and none of them had on a full uniform. The ones that were not bandaged on the head or arms were limping. That was the main reason I could tell they were soldiers. I didn't know whether they were ahead of, or following, the troops that I had seen in the camp the night before.

We stood still and watched for a while, and presently another bunch of stragglers went by.

'We shall have to stay off the road,' I told Sonia.

We went along through the trees, keeping the road in sight, till it was past noon. It was hard going. We had to force our way past the low-hanging limbs. Thorny bushes were catching Sonia's skirt and tearing it. Finally we came to a wide bushy field. There were woods on the other side. Looking to our right, we could see a small group of houses that were hidden from the road by a neck of woods which extended out into the field. Turning in that direction, we went deeper into the woods along the edge of the field, and then we started across, using the low bushes for cover. We found a dirt road leading toward the houses.

The first house we came to was empty. There was nothing inside but old rags and broken furniture, and when we went around in back, we saw a dead cow lying by the side of a well. A shadow went past us on the

ground; I looked up and saw a buzzard circling in the sky. There was a swarm of flies on the cow, and its belly was swollen enough to burst. It looked as if it had been dead for three or four days, and I wondered why the buzzard had not already come down.

We went on toward the village. There was a dead dog lying in the road. His tongue was sticking out of his mouth like a blue piece of leather, and his belly was swollen twice as big as it ought to be, and it occurred to me that there was something wrong in the village. We didn't see any people. There were houses on both sides of the street, but there was no one in sight. I had a peculiar feeling. Sonia had hold of my hand.

'But where are all the people?' she whispered.

There wasn't a sound anywhere. No dogs were barking. No voices in the houses, nor children nor old people in the street; none of the sounds that cattle make. Not the slightest movement anywhere, except the buzzard slowly wheeling around above the houses. Just the street with houses on each side, and us walking past them, straining our eyes for the sight of someone to speak to. It was a strange, uncomfortable feeling. We stopped and looked around and listened, but there wasn't anything to hear. I looked at Sonia. I could see the uneasy feeling in her face, and I knew she saw the same thing in my face. We kept waiting for something to happen. I could almost feel my ears *looking* for something to fly out at us. I looked back at the houses and started to tell Sonia that we would go into one of them and see what was inside, but somehow my voice

wouldn't work. The look I had given the houses caused Sonia to catch hold of my arm.

'Wait,' she whispered.

We walked on a little farther.

'The people must be gone,' I said, and then I saw how foolish the statement was. I laughed out loud, and then the sound of my voice made me stop as suddenly as I had started. Sonia jumped and looked at me and began laughing, and then we both began laughing at each other as loud as we could. It was the first time I had heard her laugh since we had started out.

'I think you are right,' Sonia was saying, when we heard a voice behind us say, 'Yes, all the people are gone.'

We turned quickly and saw a small, sad-faced man walking from around one of the houses. He was walking with a stick in his hand. He came up to us slowly, for he was a very old man.

I spoke to the old man. 'What has happened to this village, father? Are you an inhabitant here?'

He looked up and down the street, slowly turning himself till he had looked in a complete circle. When his eyes came back to us he said: 'I have lived all my life in this village. I did not go with the rest of them.'

'Why did they leave, father?'

'Maybe you already know more than I can tell.' He was eyeing me suspiciously.

'I know nothing — oh, this uniform! I stole it, father. I am no Bolshevik.'

'I knew you were Polish,' he responded. 'It was the

uniform that made me doubt you. So many terrible things are happening to us these days. We have to be careful to whom we speak. Now I will tell you why the people of the village have fled. A mad peasant killed the commissar who was sent here to rule us, and in revenge, the soldiers poisoned all the wells in the village. We did not know what had happened till the day they started dying. That was four days ago. It was rumored that they were going to burn the village. As soon as all the dead were buried they began leaving. But come into my house and rest awhile. You must be tired.'

'We have been walking all morning,' I answered.

The old man led us up to a small white house with a thatched roof, and we went inside. A small clay stove was built in one corner. Two wooden benches were drawn up to a bare wooden table in the center of the room, and there was a bed along the side of the wall. A few pots and pans were hanging on the wall above the stove. Above the bed, hanging from a red silk cord, was a picture of the Holy Mother that looked as if it had been smashed on the floor, and then replaced on the wall.

The old man saw me looking at it. He shook his head. 'The Bolsheviks have been this way,' he said.

I followed him out through the back door. He went up to the stable and looked in. There was a dead horse lying on his side with his legs stretched out stiffly into the air. His eyes were open and his belly was expanded.

'It was all we could do to bury the people,' he said. 'There are dead animals all over the village.'

We went back into the house.

'Sit down and rest, my child,' the old man told Sonia in a weary voice. He seated himself on the bed. 'Who knows, perhaps tomorrow the whole village will be burned to the ground,' he added.

'But our soldiers are driving them out of the country. Poland is not lost yet, father.'

The old man's sad face smiled. 'It has always been this way with Poland. If we were not such brave people we should not have to fight so much. They would come in and take the country and keep it. Brave blood has always been the price of freedom.' He shook his head sadly, as he became lost in thought.

I patted him on the shoulder. 'Tomorrow the Polish forces will be here,' I said, 'and then the people will come back to the village.'

He nodded his head without looking up.

'How far is it to Vilna?' I continued. It was time that we started on.

'If you are walking it will take a week.'

We got up to go to the door.

'You go along this road till you come to the cobblestone thoroughfare,' he directed me, 'but do not take the left-hand road you will see there. It goes to Lithuania.'

Something popped into my head. I made up my mind.

'How far is the Lithuanian border from here?'

'It isn't far. You could reach Olita by nightfall. It's right on this side of the border.'

A Bolshevik uniform would be too noticeable in a border town. Sonia's clothes were becoming ragged.

(TWO ALONE)

'Father, do you think we could find some old clothes here in the village that would be better than what we have on?'

'You could look and see,' he said. 'Try that large white house with the red tin roof. A wealthy man lived there,' he suggested, pointing up the street. 'Take anything you can find. They may all be dead by now.'

We went out into the street. He waved at us. 'God bless you!' he shouted.

DWANAŚCIE

SONIA CAME BACK OUT OF THE KITCHEN WEARING the cream-colored linen blouse and skirt she had found. She held her arms out and turned around.

'You look fine,' I said.

'I have one at home just like it,' she answered.

Her lips were wide apart and smiling. The *busteczka*, tight-fastened under her lifted chin, captured the smooth oval shape of her face and exposed the curving line of her neck which melted down into her wide shoulders. The fullness of her breasts extended outward in two generous pear-shaped points. Coming down halfway below her knee, the skirt swished about as she walked, disclosing the smooth rounded calves of her legs. She came up and kissed me, and I held her tightly for a while, but I had to let her go, because too many things began to happen inside of me.

There weren't many men's clothes to choose from, but I found a pair of black trousers and an old gray coat that would fit. After I went into the kitchen and changed, I looked around and found a piece of soap and an old razor, and stuck them in my pocket.

The old man was not in sight when we came out of the house. We started off again, and it wasn't long till we came to the main road. We waited among the trees till there was no one coming, and then we crossed over into the trees on the other side, where the road to Olita branched off to the left.

'I didn't think Lithuania was so close,' I said.

'Do you think they are having a war there too?'

'I haven't heard of any.'

'At least the Bolsheviki are not retreating that way,' Sonia remarked.

'Poland is not on such good terms with Lithuania. It was not so long ago, if you will remember, that General Zeligowski took Vilna back from them.'

She nodded her head. 'Maybe we ought not to go there.'

'Anything is better than following these Russians,' I declared.

We had got out of sight of the main road, so we left the trees and went along with the road. It was twisting down the side of a wooded hill, and when we reached the bottom, we came out into a wide valley. We could see a crooked line of trees crossing the road ahead, and when we got there we saw that the trees were growing along the course of a fresh running stream.

'Are you tired?' I asked.

'I could use a drink of water.'

Standing along the edge of the grassy bank, the trees made dark patches of shade in the sparkling water. Glossy black rocks were scattered along the bed of the

stream, and as the water swirled along, it made a soft tinkling sound. I took the razor and whetted it against the sole of my boot. The soap made a good lather. I knelt down over a small still pool to see myself as I shaved. Sonia sat and watched me. When I got through I wiped the razor off and put it back in my pocket.

'Now I feel civilized,' I said.

'Wipe the lather off your ear,' Sonia ordered.

'Where?'

'Here, let me do it,' she said.

The sun was low in the west by the time we got into the outskirts of Olita. The first house we came to was deserted, and I kept it in mind in case we wanted to use it for a place to sleep.

The road went straight into the center of the town, where there was a wide cobblestoned market-place. Along the sides of the square, small groups of people were congregated. They stood around smoking their pipes and talking in the usual after-supper custom of the people who live in the small towns of Poland. They were mostly old men, but in and out among the groups, the young fellows were strolling with their girls.

As we went past each group we tried to catch a few words of the conversation. Quite a few of them were speaking Lithuanian, but each Polish group we passed was talking of the war. On the front of a building was a large blackboard, on which was pasted a proclamation. We stopped to read it: all shops must be closed by seven o'clock; the road to the border must be free of people by nine o'clock; no one must be on the streets of the town

after eleven o'clock; anyone found in the possession of firearms would be imprisoned; and everyone in the town must report to the Commandant each week to have his identification papers inspected.

We moved on, walking slowly to catch some word that would tell us which road led to the border. On the far corner of the square we saw a signpost indicating that the Polish-Lithuanian border was two miles away. By the time we had made a complete circle of the square, the lights were being lit in the houses, and the shopkeepers were closing their doors for the night.

We went back along the street that had brought us to the market-place. The housewives were sitting out on the front steps of the houses gossiping back and forth, and the children were running around and playing in the street.

I was trying to figure out what to do next. We couldn't stay in the town, because we didn't have any money. We couldn't stay on the streets long in a town of this size without being questioned by the authorities. I had seen no Russian soldiers in the square, but it was certain that the Polish forces would arrive sooner or later, so the only thing left to do was go on across the border as soon as possible.

We came to the deserted house at the outskirts of the town. The nearest dwelling was too far away for anyone to see us, so we went inside. The house had a stale, filthy smell, but I could feel the safety of being inside a building.

I was hungry. I knew Sonia was hungry, and I also

knew that there was food in all the houses we had passed. And I decided to get some of it.

'Are you afraid to stay here alone for a while, Sonia?'

'What are you going to do?'

'We are hungry. I am going to get some food.'

'How will you get it?'

'Every house has a back door.'

'I am not afraid to stay here, but I could help you; I could watch while you go in.'

We didn't have much time. I knew the housewives would go back into their houses pretty soon. They like to talk, but they don't talk all night.

'All right,' I agreed.

Going out the back of the house, we made our way through the uncultivated fields that lay back of the town till we came up behind the houses we had passed on the street.

We passed up the ones with only one room. But pretty soon I saw a nice large house that was dark in the back. There was a low fence around it. We went up to the fence and I looked to see if there was a dog. There was a well in the center of the yard and a small shed in one corner. I picked up a small rock and tossed it at the shed to make enough disturbance to bring the dog out, if one was there, but nothing happened. I looked all around to see if we were being observed. Sonia put her hand on my arm, but I shook my head.

'Kneel down and stay close to the fence,' I whispered.

I climbed over the fence and let myself down quietly on the other side. There wasn't any moon, but I felt as if

it were broad daylight. I listened again, with my eyes on the door. I knew I was going inside to steal from these people. I didn't want to steal, but I wanted something to eat. It was easier to go back over the fence, and not do it. But Sonia was on the other side, and she was hungry too. I got up to the well, and I was afraid; it was the idea of the thing. I wasn't afraid of the people. I didn't want to get caught stealing. I didn't like the feeling of stealing. I was shaking like a coward. I decided to beg, to ask them to give me food.

I got up to the door with my mind made up not to steal. I knocked at the door. I waited. Time passed. I knocked again. My body was shaking all over. The door didn't open. My hands were tense, half-lifted up with expectation. I was ready to beg for some food from anyone who came to the door. I was looking at the place where the door would open. I waited like that for a long time, listening for the footsteps. No one came. How could I beg if no one came!

I looked at the doorknob, and something loosened up in me. I began breathing again. I wanted some food; if no one was coming to give it to me, I should have to go in and take it. The only difference between begging and stealing is the way you get it. I put my hand on the doorknob. It was cold to my hot wet hands. I turned the knob and the door opened a little. I stepped inside and immediately smelled the kitchen. It was dark, but I could see the cupboard on the other side of the room. I crossed over to it and put my hand on a large piece of meat. Above, on another shelf, was a loaf of bread.

How could this be stealing? I was willing to beg for it, but they wouldn't come and give it to me. And now I have it. Let someone try to take it away from me!

I put the bread and meat under my arm and walked to the door. They were lucky it was I stealing the food. I could take the whole kitchen. But I am not a thief. All I want is food. Another fellow would not stop with so little. I felt proud of myself.

The door was open. I walked out to the fence and handed the meat and bread to Sonia and climbed back over. We ate all of it before we got back to the deserted house.

We sat on the back step of the house to rest. The excitement of taking the food had made me restless. We were still in Poland. I wanted to get into Lithuania. There would be guards at the border. All my life I had heard of the cruel things they did to the people they caught trying to get past them without proper papers. So I was making plans. The road would be guarded at the border. If you want to get across you have to do it without their seeing you. They can't see you at night; they can't be at every foot of the border all the time.

We sat there for a long time without saying anything. The clock in the town had struck twelve, and then one, and we were still sitting there. I got up. It was time we started.

'I could sleep better in Lithuania,' I said.

I could see she was smiling. 'How do they say "sleep" in Lithuanian?'

'You snore it,' I replied.

(TWO ALONE)

We crossed the road and went in a wide circle through the fields, almost out of sight of the town, till we came to the road that was going to the border. The moon had come out. To keep from making any sounds, we walked by the side of the road. I was so tense that I jumped at every shadow I saw. We spoke in whispers. Sound carries a long way on a quiet night.

After a while the road started through some woods. The black trunks of the trees gave me a queer feeling. Every second I expected someone to step out and stop us. Finally we came out into a field again. I saw something about a half-mile up ahead on the road. We stopped to look at it, and then I saw it was a bridge. The moon was shining on the rounded steel framework.

'Is that a bridge, Wladek?'

'It's not a battleship,' I whispered, and I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. 'That's where the guards are too,' I added.

There was no use going along the road any farther. You can't cross a bridge in the middle of the night with a nest of border guards waiting there for you.

'I thought there was something too easy about our plans,' I whispered.

'Do you think it is a river?'

'That's what they build bridges across,' I replied; but I wasn't feeling very funny.

'Maybe it has dried up.'

'Maybe,' I said. I tried to speak as though I thought it might be.

We turned off through the woods so that we could

reach the river at a safe distance away from the bridge. I was not sure whether the guards patrolled the river's banks, or on which side they were stationed. We went along carefully, making as little noise as possible, and when we reached the end of the trees, we could see the river shining almost white in the moonlight. We had come out of the woods where the river was making a bend. I could see that it was flowing toward the bridge, which was less than half a mile downstream.

'Look how wide it is!' gasped Sonia.

'Shhh, Sonia,' I whispered. 'Let's go upstream. It won't be so wide up above the bend.'

We were on the inside of the bend. The ground made a gradual slope down toward the river. We followed the edge of the trees to keep out of sight of a possible border patrol. After we had gone upstream a little while, we lost sight of the bridge. The river was getting narrow. Looking farther up I could see that the riverbank was getting higher, and the width of the water wasn't decreasing any.

'This is far enough,' I told Sonia.

Leaving the trees, we went down to the edge of the water. Small waves were coming in and lapping against the soft sandy shore. We stood there and looked across the river.

'The current will be strong,' I whispered. 'It will carry us downstream, but when we swim out into it, we can depend on the sweep of the bend to push us toward the other side.'

Sonia kept her eyes on the water as she nodded her

head. I knew she couldn't use her right arm very well, because of the wound.

'We shall have to swim together,' I said. 'I will hold your right hand and swim on my side, using my right arm, and you can use your left arm.'

I sat down to take off my boots.

'Fasten your clothes on the back of your neck,' I suggested.

We got out of our clothes. When Sonia was ready, I took hold of her hand, and she followed me out. We went slowly, feeling the way with our feet in the cold water until it was up to our shoulders, and then we lifted our feet and began swimming against the current, timing our strokes together, kicking with our feet to hold the momentum after each stroke. I could feel the current working against us. We were already quite a way downstream from where we had started, but we were getting out toward the middle. Sonia was gripping my wrist, and I could feel the force of her movements as we worked together. Our arms were under the water, and the only sound we made was the breath escaping from our lips as we moved along.

I blinked the water out of my eyes and lifted up to look downstream. The bridge was just coming in sight, so I knew that we were getting into the sweep of the bend.

My arms were getting tired, and I could tell that Sonia's stroke was lagging a little. I heard a swirling gurgling sound, and I knew it was a whirlpool. I didn't have time to locate it, because Sonia began swing-

ing around in back of me. When I tried to pull around I felt the swift pull of it dragging at my legs. Sonia's head went under, and then I went under, and we bumped up against each other and lost our grip. When I tried to grab her, she slipped out of my hands. She went off to the side. I had to fight my way up, and when I got my head out of the water, I heard her coughing. She was a little way downstream from me. I got to her and grabbed her hand, and we fell into the stroke again.

We weren't making any speed, but each stroke was getting us a little closer to the other side. My breath was coming fast, and my arm was getting harder to control. I could see the outside curve of the bend, and I knew that if we could last a few minutes longer, we could make the shallow water. I slowed up the stroke to rest a little, and to take advantage of the outward force of the water.

We got our breath back, and began pulling against the current again. I saw a small strip of sand jutting out into the water where the curve of the bend straightened out, and I aimed our course at it. We were getting out of the main current, but it had cost us all our strength to do it. I couldn't put much force into my arm. I was just able to keep it moving. We were drifting more than we were swimming, and we were helpless to do anything about it.

As we came closer to the strip of sand, I could see that we were going to miss it. When we were almost even with it, I let my feet down without touching anything, but I trod water and kept them down, and when we got

even with the sand I could just touch the sandy bottom with my toes.

I did the only thing I could think of. I forced the air out of my lungs, and let myself go under. It was just deep enough to cover my head, and the current was not strong enough to push me off my feet. I had Sonia by the hand, and I walked up the slanting sand till my head came out. The flow of the water swept Sonia around, and almost took me off my footing, but she let down in time, and we walked up to the edge of the sand and fell down, half in and half out of the water, too weak to go any farther.

TRZYNAŚCIE

WE LAY ON THE SAND, OUR WET BODIES WHITE in the dim light of the dawning day. The time spent in the water had made us weak. Our straining lungs were working like bellows. We were gasping for breath in quick, pain-giving convulsions which we were helpless to control. The cold, numb feeling of exhaustion was like a heavy weight pressing us down on the sand, pinning us there with no power to move or think or feel. We lay there like that.

I tried to get my arm out from under my stomach, but I couldn't do it. I had to lie with my cheek on the damp stinking sand. My face was turned toward Sonia: she was lying on her back and I could see her heaving breasts rising and falling; her pale face, contorted with the effort of breathing, was profiled against the dim sky. I closed my eyes because of her nakedness and waited to get my strength back.

Small waves sucked and tugged at our legs. The morning wind sent a chill into my exposed body and reminded me of the necessity of getting back into my clothes. I aroused myself enough to feel in back of my

head for them. They were gone. I looked at Sonia again. Her clothes were not there either. And then I remembered the whirlpool, and going under and getting sucked around under the water.

I shook Sonia by the shoulder and she opened her eyes. She sat up in the water. The long braids of her hair came down from around her head and were hanging down upon the smooth round curve of her back. She shivered, folding her arms across the front of her breast, and then she felt for her clothes. Her *busteczka* had slipped off the clothes and still hung around her neck. The rest of her clothes were gone.

'Oh, Wladek!' she gasped.

'We lost them in the whirlpool,' I said.

'It's almost daylight, Wladek!'

'Tie the *busteczka* around you,' I told her, 'and we will go on up into the woods.'

She was unbraiding her hair as we went shivering through the trees, the roots and rocks hurting our feet as we hurried along. The trees thinned down to low bushes, and we could see the road which had continued from the bridge. Across the road about a quarter of a mile up, we saw a farmhouse, and while we were looking we saw the family come out of the back of the house. They had some empty sacks in their hands, and they piled into a wagon that was waiting and drove off toward the fields in back of the house. From where we stood I could tell that the whole family had gone. There were five of them — a man and a woman and two boys and a girl. It was the time of the year for digging potatoes.

This is a job for the whole family and I knew there was no one else in the house, unless they were sick, or too old to move about. In either case it was all right. A sick or old person could hardly stop me from getting clothes.

I didn't like the idea of going out into the open daylight without any clothes on. There was no one to see me. The road was clear. But the idea of it was enough to make me hesitate. Even an animal has hair to cover his skin. I was conscious of the self-shame of exposing my body to some chance person, but there was nothing else to do.

Sonia was sitting down in the bushes.

'Do you want my *busteczka*?' she offered.

I should have liked to have it, but I said: 'No, you had better keep it on. Someone might come by.'

I went through the bushes, crouching till I got to the road. There was nothing to hide behind all the way up to the house. The ground was flat and grassy. I stepped out of the bushes and ran all the way to the house. I could feel the nice freedom of moving without clothes, the wind brushing against my skin. My arms working freely at my sides gave me a feeling of strength and the swift movement made my blood run faster. I was not afraid or ashamed. Somehow I had a proud feeling. I was proud of my body. I watched the movement of my thighs pulling me forward, the muscles bulging and stretching. The effort of running had thrown my shoulders back and I could feel myself stiff with strength. I could feel the hot pride of it like a hidden weapon inside of me.

Running up to the door, I flung it open and stepped in. I was ready to meet anything or anybody.

There was no one in the room. I stopped in the middle of the floor. There was a bed, a table, some chairs, and a heating-stove. In one corner was a chest, the place where women's clothes are kept. I went over and lifted the lid. It was full of clothes. I selected a light blue woolen skirt and waist and some white underclothes, and then I looked around the room for something for myself. There wasn't a thing, not even a cap.

I went into the next room. It was the kitchen. The table was full of empty breakfast dishes. On one side of the room was another bed. The room was still warm from the heat of the stove. There was a pot on the stove. I lifted the lid. It was full of mush. I stuck my hand in it and took a mouthful. I turned around and saw a cloth stretched across one corner of the room, and when I looked behind it I saw what I wanted. I put on a shirt and jumped into a pair of pants and put on a coat. My feet were still bare. I remembered that I had forgotten about shoes for Sonia. I looked under the bed and found a pair of shoes for myself. They were too big, but I kept them on.

A piece of cloth was hanging by the stove. I spread it out on the table and poured some of the mush on it and gathered up the edges in my hands. In the room I had first come into I found a nice pair of high-topped shoes for Sonia, and piling the clothes in my arms, I went to the door. A wagon was coming along the road. I waited till it had passed and was out of sight. Then I left the

house, running all the way back. Sonia peeped over the bushes and I tossed her the clothes.

'When you get them on, I have something to eat,' I stated.

I could hear her movements as she went about putting on the garments I had stolen. And then she stepped out from behind the bushes.

'Do the shoes fit?' I asked.

'They are a little big.'

'So are mine.'

I handed her the bag of mush.

'Let's eat it as we go,' she suggested.

The road lay through a wooded farming district. The fields were separated from each other by long stretches of woods, but the road was a well cared for gravel-surfaced thoroughfare, and I knew it would take us through the large towns of Lithuania. We were out of the line of retreat of the Bolsheviks. Getting out of their reach was a relief, but there was something overshadowing this: we were without proper papers and penniless in a strange country that was none too friendly to Poland.

We walked all day long.

When you walk all day long you have done something. You walk awhile and rest a little and then you get up and go on again. It is not like working a few hours and then stopping to eat. It is not like that at all. When you are working at something you always know when you will get through. We didn't know that. We could always see a long stretch of road ahead. Every once in a while we met a farmer driving a wagon. They were all

going toward Olita. We figured it must be Thursday because that is the day when each farmer brings his produce to town to sell in the market-place. When they passed us the farmers would speak and we would nod our heads at them without speaking. We had decided to act dumb when anyone spoke to us, since we didn't know the language. The road was quiet and peaceful, and not at all like a road which one army is using to escape from another army.

As we went along we could see the small side roads branching off to the villages. In the villages were the only places to get food. But there is no place for a stranger in a village unless he has money to pay for what he wants. It is too easy to become suspicious in a village. I kept thinking about the good pair of boots I had lost in the river. The razor was gone too.

'I hated to lose that razor,' I told Sonia.

We were sitting under a tree that was close to the road. The sun was just going down over the tops of the trees in the west.

'Let me see the place on your head,' she said.

I leaned over toward her.

'The bump has gone down,' I said.

Her fingers were smoothing my head as she inspected the wound.

'The water cleaned it off nicely,' she said. 'It is almost closed up.'

'We will wash out the cloth that had the mush in it and rebandage your shoulder tomorrow when we find a stream,' I said. 'How does it feel?'

'It throbs every once in a while, but it doesn't hurt very much now when I move my arm.' She lifted her arm and moved it about.

'It's getting well,' I said.

'How far do you think we are from Kovno?' Sonia asked.

Kovno was the capital city of Lithuania. I knew it would take us about a week to get there, but I said, 'We ought to get there in two or three days.'

'That's not long,' she replied.

'It may take us a little longer than that,' I added. I didn't want her to be discouraged when we didn't reach the city as soon as I had said we would. A week sounds like a long time to walk when you first say it.

We had been making signs at each other as we walked along to get into the habit of doing it, but it was getting too dark to do so now, so we began to use our voices again. We had seen several lighted windows off from the road, but we had decided to sleep the first night out in the open because we were still near the border.

'The nights seem to be getting a little cold,' Sonia remarked.

'I had noticed it,' I replied.

The hay was gone from most of the fields. We peered off into the darkness trying to locate a place to sleep. We had eaten all the mush at noon, and now we were tired and sleepy and hungry again. The moon had been rising later and getting smaller, so that now it looked like a shining Russian saber, cutting its way through the clouds.

Sonia had noticed me looking up into the sky. 'They say the moon is made out of cheese,' I remarked.

'The mice have been nibbling it away,' she replied.

'How can a mouse get way up there?'

'The same way the cheese did.'

We saw a stack of hay up ahead. 'If we can't eat we can sleep,' I said.

Sonia pointed to her mouth and shook her head and held her stomach sadly, and we both laughed. I pointed to my eyes and looked sleepy, and we laughed again. It was warm under the hay. After a while we went to sleep.

The chill of the morning woke us up. It was not daylight yet, and we lay there shivering in the hay. A light dew had fallen. It made a cold, miserable stickiness on our hair and our faces. We got up and started walking along the road in the darkness to relieve ourselves of the miserable feeling.

The hunger was like an eye looking at us. It is not so bad to be hungry when you know there is food waiting in your house for you, but when you are hungry and do not know where or when you are going to get something to eat, it is different. It is easy to push an old woman aside, or fight someone for it, when you are feeling this way. If you fight for it you have to be strong enough to do it, though. But when you have been doing this for a long time it begins to affect you. The idea of stealing it gets to be disgusting because you know you have a right to it regardless of who has it.

Yet the right to eat when you are hungry depends upon

the right of the one who has it to keep it. He doesn't have to give it to you, even if you beg him for it. And when you steal it you give him the right to despise you. This doesn't hurt your conscience; it squeezes down around you and makes you feel small and worthless. The misery of it keeps you from wanting to do it, but it also makes you do it.

I walked along with this feeling in me. My stomach was getting accustomed to going without food, but it was taking my strength away. It was this weakness that was giving strength to the miserable feeling.

The sun came up. After awhile we were warm enough to walk along the road without shivering. We moved ahead, following the progress of the road with the thought in mind of getting something to eat. We would look off along each small side road as we came to it, knowing that there was a village somewhere out of sight, but close by. Food was in the villages. We knew that. But we did not want to go into the villages because the people in them are always suspicious of strangers. This attitude makes it hard to steal and easy to get caught. These villagers will befriend the people they know, but to a foreign tongue they turn a deaf ear and a bitter voice. In the larger towns, where many tongues are spoken, the stranger is more likely to find a way to live without stealing or begging, if he is careful.

We walked all morning, stopping only to get a drink at the infrequent streams which crossed the road, and sitting under the shade of small stunted trees to rest our

feet. The cultivated fields had given way to a wild and lonely countryside. The road was leading toward some low hills that were hazy blue in the distance. We kept our eyes on the hills as we walked. The fields stretching out on either side of the road were covered with short dead tufts of grass and scrawny bushes. The soil was too dry and rocky for farm land.

It was afternoon before we came into the hills. Our feet were sore and we could feel the weakness in our legs as we started up the first low grades.

'There surely must be a town on the other side of these hills,' I said. It had been a long time since I had said anything. My voice sounded strange and loud, the quietness of the hillsides making it seem unnatural to talk unless you lowered your voice. A wind sprang up and startled the trees. Sonia nodded her head. The effort of walking and the silence of the hills kept us from speaking.

As we followed the road in a crooked ascent up into the rugged slopes, we had each stopped and picked up a light dead stick on the side of the road, and we were using these to help push ourselves along. It was one thing to be hungry, but to be weak and tired, and still have to go through the effort of walking in an unknown and deserted countryside without knowing how soon you will find something to eat — that is something else.

The idea of eating gets to be important. If you don't eat you will get weaker. If you get weaker, you tire easily, and have to stop and rest. The longer you rest the hungrier you get, and you are not getting any nearer

to the food. So you keep on walking and thinking about eating. It is the idea of wanting food that hurts you, but it is the weakness coming from going without food that hurts you the most. The hunger is not as bad as the weakness. If you have been going hungry for a long stretch of days and are exerting yourself all the time, and eating something every once in a while when you happen to get it, the whole thing starts adding up. You find it out when you see how quickly you get weak after you haven't eaten for a day or so.

I looked at Sonia. The effort of walking was making her frown. There were lines in her face. Her eyes were dull and downcast. There was still plenty of flesh on her bones, but her movements were slow and without force; she was walking like an old woman, bent over and plodding along with the stick in her hand. The beauty and grace of her movements seemed to have drained off from her like the rain which falls upon a hill and runs down into the valleys, leaving the cruel marks of its presence behind.

We made our way up to the top of the hill, stopping once in a while to look back down it to see how far we had come. The top leveled off into a bushy plateau which extended forward as far as our eyes could see. But on the left, a few miles ahead, we could see that the ground was making a gradual slant downward, and it was this way that the road was turning. We could see where it disappeared, going down around the shoulder of the plateau.

When we had walked awhile longer we came to the

steep descent which the road was making. The ground fell away on either side, making the beginning of a narrow valley which seemed to be deepening and widening as we followed the road downward, to the right, around the shoulder of the plateau. We were going down into the valley, but as yet we could see no sign of a town.

Far off and below we could see the green tops of trees the size of pins. We kept following along the side of the yellow cliff-like end of the plateau, descending till we were getting to where the ground was making a more gradual slope into the floor of the valley. Just as we seemed to be rounding the end of the upthrusting shoulder, while we were still above the tree-tops, we saw the sharp, slender steeple of a church sticking up above the red and green and black rooftops of a group of buildings that were almost hidden in the mass of trees that covered the valley. We stopped with joy at the sight.

'It's a town!' Sonia exclaimed. And then she breathed a long deep sigh.

I looked up at the sun in the sky. It was about three o'clock.

'If we keep on walking,' I said, 'we can get there while it is still daylight.' I wanted to rest awhile, and I knew Sonia was tired, but we were hungry also, and I knew that if we didn't get to the town before dark we should probably have to go without food another night, and I knew we couldn't do that.

'Come on,' I urged. 'It's downhill all the rest of the way.'

The road turned off into the trees and down the sloping ground at the base of the high yellow bluff, and we lost sight of everything in the town except the church steeple. We came out onto the level floor of the valley and followed the road through the trees till we began to pass the houses that were on the outskirts of the town.

The road became a street. We made our way along the sidewalks, past the rows of houses, arriving finally in the business section of the town. I couldn't read the signs on the stores, but I could tell what each one was selling by observing the bundles that were under the arms of the people coming out of the doors. As we walked up the street we came to a park that was green with pine trees and low shrubbery. Going in through the arched stone entrance, we followed a gravel pathway until we found an empty bench.

We sat together on the bench, tired, hungry, dusty, and miserable. I did not know what to do next. A man and a woman strolled by. I caught a few of their words. They were speaking German. I knew the language well enough to speak it, but they were gone before I realized that I could have talked to them without having to speak Polish.

'They were speaking German,' I told Sonia.

She had not heard me. She was sitting there with her eyes on the ground, fumbling unconsciously with something on her finger. Then she looked up at me.

'What?'

I kept my eyes on her hand. 'What is that on your finger, Sonia?'

'It is a ring. What were you saying?'

I had not noticed it before. It was a small gold ring with a blue stone in it.

'What were you saying?' Sonia repeated.

'You have a ring, Sonia,' I stated.

'It's my birthstone,' she replied. 'What were you saying, Wladek?'

'Let me see the ring.'

She slipped it off of her finger and handed it to me. I held it up close and looked at it.

'It's gold,' I said.

'My father gave it to me,' she explained. She didn't seem to understand what I meant.

'It's gold, Sonia. We can sell it and get money to buy food!' I was almost shouting.

'Oh,' she said, and then added, 'Oh, food!' and her eyes lit up.

'Yes,' I answered.

I put the ring in my pocket.

'You stay here and rest,' I told Sonia. 'I'll go and get some food. Are you afraid to stay here? No one will bother you. Just sit here and wait for me.'

'All right,' she agreed.

'I'll be right back.'

My hand was inside my pocket holding the ring. I went back along the path to the entrance of the park. People were passing up and down the sidewalk. Wagons were rumbling over the cobblestoned street. Some of the men were smoking cigarettes, holding them in their hands as they blew the smoke out into the air the same

way I had done for years, but the sight of it caught my eye and held my attention.

I was starving for bread, and these people could afford to spend money for things they could not eat. Their bellies were full of food. I looked at their smiling contented faces. My hair was shaggy. I needed a shave. My clothes were wrinkled and dirty. They had warm beds to sleep in. I felt like an animal. All my thoughts had been centered on getting food and trying to keep alive from day to day. How long it had been since I had smoked a cigarette! How would a bed feel? I walked along looking into the windows of the shops, a grocery store, a butcher shop, a bakery! The sweet smell of fresh bread went to my head like wine. My head was dizzy with the thought of just one mouthful of it.

Across the street I saw a shop that had a large clock hanging in front of it. A watchmaker's, a place to sell the ring. I walked across the street and went into the shop. A little old man with glasses was sitting at a small table behind the counter. He looked up at me. I leaned over the counter and handed him the ring. My hand shook.

'How much will you give me for the ring?' I asked in German.

He took the ring in his hand, looking it over closely, inspecting the setting, holding it up to the light that came through the window. He looked at me, peering through his glasses suspiciously, his eyes traveling from my face down my wrinkled dusty clothes.

He replied in German, 'Where did you get this ring?'

The look in his eyes was transferred to his voice, his lips curling at the edges, accusing me without saying anything.

'It's my sister's. We are strangers here. We want to sell the ring to buy food.'

'Wait,' he ordered, and he got up to go through a door that led to the back of the shop. He still kept the ring in his hand. I did not like the way he looked. He had the movements of a snake.

'No,' I said. 'Give it back.'

He kept it in his hand. Something came over me. I saw red. It was the sly way he was looking at me, the way he had of moving and talking, a snake-eyed suspiciousness.

'Don't you want to sell it?'

'Where are you going?'

'I will be back in a minute.' He started toward the door.

'Wait,' I commanded. 'Give me back the ring.'

'You stole this ring.'

'Give it back.' I was ready to climb over the counter after him.

He changed his voice. 'I thought you wanted to sell it,' he hissed. His eyes had that sneaking glitter.

'Not to you.' I reached my hand out. 'Hand it here.'

He waited a second longer and then he handed the ring back to me, his prying eyes telling me of his suspicious thoughts. I grabbed the ring and went out the door. I wasn't sure what this crawling-eyed *człowiek* was trying to do, but I wasn't going to give him a chance to do it.

I went on up the street looking for another jewelry shop. My legs were carrying me along, but the weakness seemed to be holding me back. There was a weak, sick feeling in the pit of my stomach which seemed to go up into my head and made it ache in a half-dizzy way. You can't think straight when you get like this. Your head is light and your feet are heavy and your eyes don't work right. You can't see clearly. You have to stare at the things you want to see.

I saw the wet green boards of a watering trough by the curbing. I went over to it and splashed some water on my face, but it didn't help any. Drying my face on my sleeve, I walked on up the street. I could see the church steeple sticking up in the distance, and just then I heard a bell tolling slowly and loudly. I tried to count the time, but I got mixed up, and it stopped before I could get it straightened out. I couldn't figure out whether it had struck four or five times.

I crossed the street and went along a side street that looked as though it would have a jewelry shop on it, but the shops were all tailors' and blacksmiths' and butchers'. I turned to the left and went a block and turned to the left again to get back to the first street I had come up. The sun was going down behind the other side of the street and I knew I had to get back to Sonia. I went on till I knew that I was getting back close to the park again.

When I passed the baker's shop I stopped and walked back and looked in the window. There were several kinds of bread on display. The ring ought to be worth one

loaf of bread. But I hesitated. Bread is worth more than a ring. Bread is the most valuable thing in the world. I changed my mind. I decided to go in and see if he would give me half a loaf of bread for the ring. Maybe, if I asked him right, he would let me have half a loaf.

I opened the door and went in, smelling the wonderful bakery air. A man was just coming through the back door of the shop. I could tell that he was German. He was heavy set, with short-clipped hair and a large round face. I went up and put the ring down on the counter.

'Give me some bread,' I said in German. 'Take the ring. Give me half a loaf. My sister and I haven't eaten for two days. Have you a daughter? Give the ring to her. Just a little bread is all I want.'

He looked at me and then he looked at the ring and then he looked back at me. I couldn't tell what he was going to do. My head was swimming with the thought of eating. I leaned against the counter to support myself.

'Half a loaf,' I repeated.

He took a loaf of bread in his hand in a sudden movement and held it out to me.

'Here, you can have the bread,' he said.

His action had been so sudden I did not know what to do. He leaned over and put the bread in my hand. 'Go and eat it with your sister,' he ordered. He pushed the ring back.

I walked to the door with the bread in one hand and the ring in the other. I could feel the weight of the bread in my hand, the nice soft crisp feeling of bread. I looked back. He was standing there with his head to

one side. I went back up to him, his eyes following me. I wanted to thank him for the bread. I wanted to make him understand how generous he was, but I couldn't say anything. I looked at him and his eyes understood me and I walked back to the door with the bread in my hand, looking at him as I went. I pushed the door open and went on out and down the street to the entrance of the park. I hurried up the curving path.

When I came in sight of the bench I did not see Sonia. The bench was empty. I went up to the bench, looking around to see where she was hiding. She was playing a joke. I looked behind the low hedge behind the bench. She wasn't there. I looked across on the other side of the path, but it was all flat level grass. There was a bush with small yellow blossoms a little farther on. I went up and peeped behind it. She wasn't there. I looked around. There was an iron statue of a group of soldiers charging up a hill. I ran over and looked behind it, but she wasn't behind it.

The thought suddenly struck me: she was gone. It wasn't a joke because there wasn't any other place to look. I had looked everywhere. She was gone. I went back to the bench. A crazy feeling was coming over me. I put the bread down on the bench. A man passed by. I grabbed his arm and shouted at him:

'Did you see a girl here? She was hungry. I went to get some bread. I got the bread, and now she is gone!'

He looked at me and said something that I couldn't understand. He jerked his arm away and went off looking back at me.

I began shouting Sonia's name and running around on the grass looking for her. I saw a girl farther up the path and I ran up to her. She turned around and looked at me and then began to run. I went back along the path and sat down on the bench with my head in my hands. When I looked up there was a crowd of people standing along the pathway watching me.

A policeman came up and took me by the arm. He started to lead me away. I held back till I could pick up the loaf of bread. I tried to tell him what had happened. I was speaking German and he didn't seem to understand. We went across the park, crossed the street, and went into a large brick building. He led me up some steps and through a hall and into a room and stood with me in front of a man behind a desk.

I tried to tell the man what had happened. I showed him the bread.

'Who are you?' he asked in German.

'Wladek Stanislow.'

'Did you steal the bread?'

'No. The baker gave it to me.'

'Why did he give it to you?'

'I offered him the ring for it, but he gave me the bread and told me to keep the ring,' I explained. I took the ring out of my pocket and showed it to him. He took the ring and the bread and put them on his desk.

'Why did you want to give him the ring for the bread?'

'My sister was hungry. We are both hungry. I wanted to get bread for us to eat.'

'What is your sister's name?'

'Sonia.'

'Where is she?'

'She is gone.'

He said something to the policeman and the policeman explained something. I couldn't understand what they were saying.

'Where is your sister?' he continued.

'I left her on a bench in the park.'

They began to talk again. I could tell that they were talking about me. And then I heard them mention Sonia. I broke in on their conversation.

'Do you know where she is? Is she here? If she is not here I want to go and find her.'

Two more policemen came up and took hold of me. One of them began searching me, and when they didn't find anything in my pockets they began pulling me out of the room toward a side door. I got mad. I tried to get back over to the bread and the ring, but they held me and forced me along a narrow hallway and down a flight of steps into another hallway that had a row of iron doors on each side. They opened one of the doors and shoved me in. I heard them lock the door and walk off.

I was in a small cell that had an iron bunk with a blanket on it. A dim light was coming from a small barred window near the ceiling. I went over and sat down on the bunk.

When Wladek had gone I began to be afraid. I didn't like to be by myself in this strange town. People were passing by and looking at me. Their eyes had a strange

gaze in them, as though there were something about me that was exposed. I tried to brush the dust out of my clothes, but the dirt stains would not come out.

I waited a long time. The miserable feeling of being alone seemed to stick to me like the syrup that sticks to a child's dirty hands. I couldn't get rid of it. I knew Wladek would get back as soon as he could, but I was afraid to be by myself, alone with all these strange people passing by and staring at me.

There was a tall bush with small yellow flowers on it near by. A man was clipping the loose branches off the bush. It was the same kind of bush that grew around our house. We would cut the loose branches off and bind them together to make brooms to sweep the floor. I thought of our house, the cool shady stream running by the side of it, the trees that grew around the field, the people I knew in the village, and the things they did each day. I remembered the smoke coming out of the chimney the night we left without saying good-bye. The smoke was curling out of the chimney, going slowly up, and the moon was shining. The tiny yellow windows of the houses of the village were looking back at us as we turned on the bridge and started along the road.

The man clipping the branches had brought these thoughts to me, and I watched him as he went away carrying the branches under his arm. I walked over to the bush and picked one of the flowers and took it back to the bench with me. I held it in my hands and looked at it. I thought of my parents and what they had thought when I did not come back that night. The

tears came in my eyes and I bent down and wiped them on the hem of my skirt.

I got up and went back along the path to the street to see if I could see Wladek coming. He did not come in sight. I went back to the bench. A bell began to toll slowly. I counted the strokes. It was four o'clock.

I sat on the bench waiting, the miserable feeling of wanting food crawling like bugs inside of me. The tears came back into my eyes again and I tried to wipe them away. I tried to control myself. I tried to tell myself that Wladek would be back any minute.

Two old women came by and stopped in front of me. They were saying something to me. I couldn't understand them. I spoke to them in Russian, but they did not understand. They shook their heads. I could see that they wanted to help me. One of them patted me on the shoulder. A few more people came up and stood around looking at me, talking to each other behind their hands.

Then I saw a policeman coming through the crowd. He looked around and then he started toward me. I got up and started off through the crowd, but he caught up with me. I stopped when he took hold of my arm. He began to talk to me, but I couldn't understand him. The crowd was saying something to the policeman, and when he spoke to them sharply they began to move away. He was trying to talk to me again and I was trying to dry my eyes with my skirt and tell him in Russian that I was waiting for my brother to come back with something to eat. He pulled me and motioned for me to

come with him. I was afraid to disobey him, so I let him lead me on through the park.

He took me across the street into a large brick building. The room he took me into looked like some kind of waiting-room. There were an old man and an old woman sitting on a bench. They looked at me and then at each other. The policeman had gone out, closing the door behind him. The old woman would say something to the old man and he would shout something at her, and they would shut up and not look at each other for a while till she would say something again, and then he would shout at her.

After I had waited awhile the policeman came back through the door and motioned for me to follow him. He took me across the hall into a room where there was a man behind a desk. I stood before him and he looked at me. I began to ask him in Russian what they were going to do to me, but he didn't understand what I was saying. He said something in two or three languages, but I couldn't understand anything he said. He was frowning at me. Then he stopped and thought for a minute, trying to figure out some way to talk to me. The policeman standing beside me said something to him, and when he nodded his head the policeman left the room.

When he came back there was another man with him. The man behind the desk said something to the man who had just come in with the policeman, and then the man turned to me and said in Russian, 'Do you speak Russian?'

'Yes,' I answered.

Then he began to ask me questions which the man behind the desk told him to ask.

'What is your name?'

'Sonia.'

'Sonia what? What is your last name?'

'Stanislaw,' I replied, using Wladek's last name.

The man behind the desk was writing the answers down. The man had asked me how old I was, but before I could tell him the man behind the desk had stopped him and asked him to spell out the last name I had given him.

'Now, how old are you?' he repeated.

'Sixteen.'

'What were you sitting so long in the park for?'

'I was waiting for my brother to get some food.'

'Where is your brother, and what is his name?'

'His name is Wladek. I don't know where he is now. I don't even know where I am right now. He would have come back to me in the park if you had not taken me away. Now he will not know where I am. Why don't you let me go back to the park? I cannot go to Kovno without him.'

'Do you live in Kovno?'

'No.'

'Where do you live?'

I did not want them to know we were Polish, so I told him that we were from Olita, the town on the border.

'Why are you going to Kovno?' the man asked.

'We have relatives there.'

'How old is your brother?'

'Eighteen.'

'Where did your brother go after food?'

'I don't know where he went. He was going to sell my ring and buy it. If I don't go back to the park he will not be able to find me.' I was speaking to the man behind the desk and he was listening to what the man at my side was saying. 'Why don't you let me go back to the park and wait for my brother?' I asked him, but he waved the question aside with his hand and said something to the interpreter.

'Are you hungry?' he asked.

'Oh, yes!'

'What does your brother look like?'

'He is a little taller than I, and he has dark wavy hair.'

I stood there while they began talking among themselves. They would turn their eyes at me and speak to each other and then try to think a little, and then they would talk some more, looking at me every once in a while. Finally the policeman who had brought me in from the park took my arm and pointed to the door of the room I had waited in, and went with me through the door into it. The old man and woman were still sitting together, looking at each other. He motioned for me to sit down, and then he went back through the door.

After a while a woman came through the door. She had on a long gray dress. A bunch of keys dangled from her belt. She had a bowl of soup in one hand and a piece

of bread in the other. She set the soup in front of me on the table and handed me the bread. She didn't have to tell me to start eating.

My head was all tangled up. I couldn't figure out what had happened to Sonia. I sat on the bunk in the cell with the cold dark feeling of being alone behind a locked door. I hadn't done anything for them to do this to me. They were the ones who were doing the wrong thing. I had a right to be outside walking around free. They didn't have the right to stop me from doing that. I was only trying to get something to eat.

I went up to the door and felt the cold smooth surface of it with my hands. I took my hands away, I didn't like the touch of it. There was a small round hole in the door just high enough for me to look out. I put my face up to it and looked out into the silent hallway. A lantern was attached to the ceiling. Across from me was another door.

I looked at the small round hole. A man's face was in the hole. I could see his eyes and his nose and some shaggy hair hanging down on his forehead. He was looking at me. I could understand the look in his eyes. It was the wild, stupid animal stare. His eyes were shouting at me that he wanted to get out. And then I heard him laugh. It was a cold wet dripping laugh like the sound of trickling water in a dark cave. He said something, but I couldn't understand his words. His voice was like cold water lapping against rocks in the dark. I spoke in German.

‘What did you say?’

He kept on staring at me without saying anything. I drew my head back a little. His eyes seemed to follow the slightest movement I made. I heard him laugh again. I could understand the queer mocking language of his laughter. It made me feel sick in my stomach.

I turned away from the hole and looked around the cell again. There was a small three-legged wooden stool standing by the head of the bunk that I had not seen at first. I sat down on the bunk again, the weakness and hunger making me sit there, while the numb and hopeless feeling bit into my head and wormed itself around me, clutching me tightly, going inside of me and feeding on my strength.

Presently I heard footsteps out in the hallway. Men seemed to be going from door to door, opening them and closing them, and then going on. They opened my door, and when I did not get up, one of them came in with a bucket in his hand. He set a bowl on the stool and dipped some soup out into it. He put a piece of bread by the bowl and handed me a wooden spoon. He went out and the other fellow closed and locked the door.

I sat there with the spoon in my hand, looking at the soup and bread. I wanted to eat it, but I couldn’t seem to get started. I wanted to eat, but I couldn’t eat. I couldn’t think about eating. I couldn’t think about anything. I was sitting there in the dim light of the cell with the spoon in my hand, and I couldn’t seem to think about anything.

I looked down at the spoon and then I reached over

and pulled the stool in front of me, and then I began to eat. I bit off a piece of bread and began chewing it. I took a spoonful of soup and let it go down my throat. And then it was all gone before I knew it. I took the last small piece of bread and sopped it in the bowl, and then I ate it. After I had finished chewing and swallowing the bread I lay down on the bunk. It was dark all around, and I went to sleep.

I woke up while they were opening the door. One of them came in and filled the bowl up with mush. He put a piece of bread on the stool and walked back out of the door. The guard banged the door closed, and they went on down the hall. I felt stronger after the rest of sleeping all night.

Daylight was coming in through the small window. I sat up and began eating the food. The mush had a stale, greasy taste, but I did not let the taste of it keep me from eating it. I was still hungry when I finished. I wanted a drink of water, but they were already gone.

I sat on the bunk and looked at the hole in the door. I wondered if the face was still looking out of the hole across the hall. There was something about the face that made me restless. I got up and walked around the cell without looking through the hole. I knew I would see his crazy eyes and hear his queer laugh if I did.

I put the stool under the window and stood on it. I could just see over the concrete sill. The sky was blue. Bright white clouds were floating motionless on each side of the window as far as I could see. Straight ahead

I could see the top of a brick wall, and on the other side of the wall I could see the roof of a building. Farther off and to the right was the church steeple.

I took hold of the iron bars and pulled myself up to see what was below the window. There was a large bare yard. A pile of bricks was in one corner. I got down from the window and sat back on the bunk.

I was sitting there and I knew that Sonia was alone somewhere. She had to be in the town, because I knew she would not go anywhere without me. I tried to figure it out. She was waiting for me in the park and when I got back she was not there. She would not leave the park unless someone made her do it. No one but a policeman can make you do anything, unless they are stronger than you are and want to gain something for themselves by doing it. She was in a public place. If anyone but a policeman had done anything to her, someone would have seen it and called the police, and they would know about it.

I didn't know whether I had figured it out right or not, but I knew I wasn't doing any good sitting in a cell by myself. I couldn't do anything about it if I stayed in a locked cell.

I stood up and went over to the hole in the door. The face was in the other hole. The man pushed his face up close to the hole when he saw me. There was a dim light falling on his wild stupid staring eyes. He began laughing. His voice seemed to go into my head and feel around in a cold jerking way.

Then he laughed louder, and the sound of it was too

much for me. It seemed to be tearing up my brain. My head was popping and blazing. I began cursing and shouting at him and beating against the door with my fists, trying to drown out his crazy mocking laughter. I was trying to make all the damn noise I could. I pounded the door with the stool till two guards came down the hall and opened my door.

One of them shouted something at me. He was trying to speak German. He was telling me to stay quiet. I threw the stool against the wall and shouted back at them to get the hell back where they belonged. I went up to them and shook my fist in their faces. They shouted something and I shouted back at them, and then one of them grabbed me and gave me a shove. I went back against the wall hard and slid down to the floor. I couldn't get up right away. They said something and slammed the door shut. I got up and went back to the door and started the racket all over again.

It wasn't long till they came back and opened the door. Both of them grabbed me and pushed me through the hall and up the stairs and stood me before the man behind the desk. He was waiting for me. I could see it in his eyes. I tried to calm down.

'Why are you making such a racket?'

'The fellow across the hall annoys me,' I answered. 'He is driving me crazy with the way he laughs.'

'Is that all?' The way he spoke made the two guards snicker.

'No,' I said. 'I want to know where my sister is.' I watched his face. 'Just let me see her and I will stay

quiet.' His face didn't change. I couldn't tell whether or not he knew where Sonia was.

'We have ways of keeping you quiet,' he stated. He spoke to the guards. 'Put him in the dungeon.'

They took hold of me, but I wrested myself loose from them.

'Wait,' I pleaded. 'I will be quiet.' The guards had hold of me again. I tried to get free, but they were dragging me along toward the door. He motioned for the guards to let me go. I came back to him. 'Please tell me if she is here. I will do anything you say.' I had to wipe the tears out of my eyes.

He looked at me sternly. 'We do not have to bargain with you, but if you will go back to your cell and be quiet I will give you some news of her in a few days.'

That was enough for me. I didn't know why they were holding us, but I did know that she was here in the same place with me. I went back to the cell with the guards.

I finished the soup and bread. When I looked around I saw that the woman had left the door open a little when she had gone out. I could see them standing together talking, but I couldn't hear what they were saying. They would glance at me every once in a while, so I knew they were talking about me.

I was so worried I didn't know what to do. I couldn't think of anything except Wladek. When he came back to the park he wouldn't know where I was. I didn't know why the policeman had brought me here. I was

afraid, and sick with the thought of not knowing where Wladek was. I was full of a dreadful feeling, and it seemed to be crouched inside of me and tearing me up with slow squeezing fingers.

One of the men said something to the woman and she came in through the door. She came up to me and took me by the arm, and when I got up she led me past the man behind the desk and out through a hallway. We turned a corner and came to a door.

'Where are you taking me?' I asked the woman in Russian.

She selected a key and opened the door. She didn't say anything, and I stood still until she motioned for me to go in. I walked in and turned around just as she was closing the door. The light of the hallway was dim, but I could see that she was not a mean woman. Her eyes were holding me with a calm straight look as she closed the door, and then she turned the key in the lock. I heard her footsteps go softly away.

I turned around and looked at the room. It was a small cell. A little light was coming in through a small barred window near the ceiling. I noticed a lamp on a shelf on the wall by the door. Some matches were on the shelf. I lit the lamp. Against the wall opposite the door was a small narrow bed made of wood. There was a pillow at one end with the blankets stretched up over it, making the bulge to show the head of the bed. A low wooden stool stood by the head of the bed. By the stool on the floor was a bucket with a tin cup hanging on it. The bucket was empty.

I stood around without knowing what to do. I looked at the walls of the room. I looked at the lamp burning. I could smell it and see the small yellow flame wavering through the glass chimney. There were voices out in the hall. They weren't saying anything that I could understand. They were not near enough to be loud. I kept waiting for them to say something about Wladek. I couldn't think about anything else except him. I couldn't think about anything else. My head was sick with the thought of it. The feeling was all over the room pushing the silence at me, cutting into me like knives that seemed to twist and thrust and burn.

I heard someone coming down the hall. I ran up to the door. There was a little round hole in it and I looked out and saw the matron. She had stopped in front of the door and was saying something and motioning at something in the room, but I didn't understand what she meant. She unlocked the door. I wasn't quick enough to get out of the way and the door brushed against me. She patted my shoulder as though she were sorry the door had hit me, and then she went over and turned the lamp down. And then I knew what she had been talking about. I didn't know what time it was. I looked at the window and saw that it was dark outside. She said something and went back out, locked the door, and walked away.

I went over to the bed and pulled back the blankets. There weren't any sheets. The blankets were on top of a bag of straw. I took my shoes off and lay down on the bed. The pillow was a stiff bag of rags. All the voices

had stopped. There was no noise anywhere. The lamp was still lit. I got up and blew it out.

I woke up all of a sudden. Daylight was coming in through the window. It made a square patch of light on the wall just above the stool by the side of the bed. As I lay there the cold sick feeling came back to me. I was sorry I had waked up. I got up and put on my shoes when I heard the woman coming. She opened the door and came in with a cup of hot milk. A hard-boiled egg and a piece of bread were on a plate in her hand. There was some salt on the bread for the egg.

She handed the food to me and I set it down on the stool. I didn't want to eat. I was so worried about Wladek I didn't feel like eating. She picked up the milk and handed it to me again. She was saying something in Lithuanian.

'I don't want anything to eat,' I told her. 'I want to find my brother.'

I knew she couldn't understand what I was saying, but I thought she would understand what I meant. She kept offering me the milk with an expression on her face that said it was good and she wanted me to drink it. She put the cup in my hand, and when I felt its warmth again it reminded me that the cell was chilly. I turned the cup up and drank the milk, and when I had finished she pointed to the rest of the food, but I shook my head. She went out and locked the door and walked off down the hall.

I walked around in the small space of the cell trying to get warm. I didn't know what to do with myself.

Sitting down was worse than standing up. I couldn't stand still. The strange voices in the corridor made me restless. Looking out of the little hole in the door I could see only a blank wall. I couldn't tell which way the voices were coming from. A long time passed. I wanted to talk to someone. I was afraid to think of what they were going to do to me, and afraid of the sour loneliness that was coming over me because of not knowing what was happening to Wladek. I wanted to know where he was, and I wanted to be with him wherever he was.

I knelt down by the bed. I just asked to get back to Wladek. I didn't ask for anything else. The tears began to come in my eyes and I stayed down on my knees for a long time with my head on the bed just asking for that one thing, shivering with the strange loneliness.

Someone opened the door. It was the matron. She was crossing herself as she came up to me, because she had seen me praying. In her other hand was a bowl of potatoes and cabbage. There was a piece of meat and two pieces of bread. She gave the bowl to me and I put it on the bed. She saw the other food on the stool and shook her head at me, making a noise with her tongue in her mouth. I shook my head to say that I didn't want to eat, and then — I couldn't help it — I began crying again. She began to pat me on the shoulder and talk to me. Her voice was kind and her hand was gentle, but I turned away and went over to the bucket by the stool. I reached down to get a drink, but then I remembered that there wasn't any water in it.

'I should like to have a drink of water,' I said. She took the bucket out and came back with it half full of water. I dipped the tin cup in and took a drink. It tasted like metal, but I was thirsty and I drank it all.

'You are such a nice woman,' I said. 'Will you help me find out where my brother is?'

She shook her head to show that she didn't understand. I sat down on the bed. She took a spoonful of cabbage and held it up to my mouth. I didn't want to eat it, but she was looking at me so kindly I opened my mouth and ate it for her. She put the spoon back in the bowl and motioned for me to go ahead and eat, but I shook my head.

'I can't eat. I'm worried about my brother.'

The matron left again and I sat down on the bed again. I had got up and gone to the door with her. I didn't even want to look at the food. I had no news of Wladek. I was thinking about him. I would have eaten the food if I had been hungry, but I just wasn't hungry. I couldn't think about eating.

I lay down on the bed all afternoon, and when the woman came back with the food for the evening I couldn't touch it. She talked to me and shook me by the shoulder and tried to put the food in my mouth, but I would turn my head away and keep my mouth closed. At last she went back out again and left me alone and I lay down on the bed and cried. I wasn't making any noise, I was just crying. The tears filled up and came out of my eyes and I couldn't help it. I had to sit up and dry my eyes with my skirt, and then I would lie down again.

When I woke up the matron was shaking me. It was horrible to wake up like that. I was still in the cell, but I had been dreaming of home, and I had waked up expecting to see my mother. When I saw it was the matron I began to cry again without making any noise. She had some milk and rice in a bowl and I had to shove it away.

I was still sitting on the bed when she opened the door again. She came in, and then I saw that someone was with her, and then I recognized the man who had been the interpreter when I was talking to the man behind the desk. The man came over to me.

'How are you?' he inquired.

I was glad to talk to someone who could talk to me.

'Where is my brother?' I asked him, and he didn't reply.

'You had better eat,' he said, and then I began to cry. I begged him to let me see my brother for a minute. 'Why can't I see my brother?' I asked him, and he said that he was only an interpreter, that he didn't have anything to do with it. He talked with the matron a minute, and then he said: 'Please eat. You will be sick if you don't eat something.'

I said I wasn't going to eat. I couldn't eat. If I could see my brother maybe I could eat a little. He looked at the woman and shrugged his shoulders and she shook her head from side to side and they started to leave. I ran after them, but the matron kept me back till she had got through the door. Then she locked the door and they walked away.

The time I was spending in the cell was getting to be like a dream. I couldn't seem to understand what it was all about. The things that were happening didn't seem to mean anything. The face in the hole in the door wasn't real any more, and the sound of the man's laugh was just part of the way his face looked. I would sit down on the bunk, and when I would get up and walk around I couldn't tell how long I had been sitting there. I knew that they knew where Sonia was. I didn't know what was happening to her. I could think of a lot of things, but I tried to reason it out that since they weren't doing anything to me, they weren't doing anything to her. I kept trying to convince myself of that.

But the time was getting to be too much like dreaming. I couldn't keep track of it. The guard would bring in some food and I would eat it and then I would sit on the bunk and wait for something to happen. I didn't know whether anything would happen or not, but I was waiting for it. I couldn't think of anything that would happen because it seemed as if there wasn't anything happening any more. It seemed as if everything had stopped, everything had already happened. So I couldn't figure out what I was waiting for.

I was sitting there like that when I began to hear a big racket out in the hallway. It sounded like two or three people scuffling. Keeping my face to the hole, I waited for them to pass by. They passed my door. One guard was leading two fellows along, and coming behind them were two guards dragging a third fellow. He was making the guards grunt. The *człowiek* who was giving the

guards all the trouble was saying something in Polish. He was telling them to keep their damn dirty hands off him. When they got the door open I heard a skull-cracking sound and the scuffling stopped. The guards came back down the corridor muttering something about filling up the place with crazy half-starved sons-a-bitches.

It was getting dark when the guard brought the food in again. The fellow down the hall had begun moaning. After I had eaten I lay down and went to sleep. When I woke up the fellow was still moaning.

When the guards had brought in the morning meal I had asked one of them for a cigarette. I had eaten the mush and smoked the cigarette and was just getting ready to climb up on the stool to look out of the window when the guard came up and opened the door again. He came in. I got down off the stool and he took me by the arm and led me to the door. I didn't know what he wanted. He started to push me through the door. I held back. I shook my head.

'I don't have to go now,' I explained, but he pointed upward and motioned for me to go on.

At first I didn't understand, and then I saw what he meant. He took me up the stairs, and when I walked into the room where the captain was seated behind his desk I saw Sonia sitting on a bench along the side of the wall. She saw me and I saw her. I went up to her and she stood up and she couldn't talk and I couldn't, and I couldn't hold her or kiss her because she was supposed to be my sister. She began to cry, but it wasn't that kind

of crying; it was the kind you are happy about and can't say it, and I was standing there patting her on the shoulder. She was looking at me and we were standing there with this feeling and not able to do anything about it.

I felt someone's hand on my arm. It was the guard pulling me over in front of the captain behind the desk.

There was a large window behind him that I had not seen before, and through it I could see the tall trees in the park across the street. Sonia and I stood by the guard facing the man behind the desk. There was a policeman sitting at a little table on the left of the captain writing something. I could hear the pen scratching. He stopped and handed the paper to the captain.

When the man behind the desk looked at me he coughed, and then he said, 'I am going to release both of you.'

He said it in a soft voice, but when the meaning of it hit me I felt as though a big gun had just gone off close to my ear. The explosion seemed to rock me back on my heels. My ears were buzzing like wings fluttering. I looked at him to see if he were playing a joke, but he had already turned his head away and was talking to the fellow sitting at the table by the window. Nobody seemed to realize how important what he had said was!

I was afraid they were going to hear my heart beating and begin asking a lot of questions and then throw us back in the cells again. I didn't know what to do. Every time my heart beat my head went around faster. I wanted to ask him why he had put us in jail in the first place, but I thought it might make him change his mind

and not let us go. I wasn't sure whether we could go, or whether he still had something else to say.

I looked at Sonia and she was looking at him. My head felt as if it were turning on a wooden peg. The guard still had me by the arm, and when I looked at him he let my arm go. I wanted to get out of the place, but I didn't know whether to go or stay. The suspense was shaking my knees. There was sweat on my face. I looked at the guard and he looked at me, but I couldn't read anything in his face. He didn't seem concerned about it.

'Does that mean we can go?' I asked. My voice wasn't very loud and it had a squeak in it. He didn't understand what I had said, but he had caught the meaning. He said something to the man behind the desk. The captain nodded his head without looking at us.

The guard nodded his head.

We were almost at the door when we heard the captain say, 'Wait a minute!'

We stopped and turned around. He pulled out a drawer of his desk and took something out of it.

'Here is your ring.'

I went back and took it.

'You were on your way to Kovno, weren't you?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' I replied.

'All right,' he continued. 'If I find you here after twenty-four hours I'll arrest you again. Is that clear?'

That was music. I thought he had changed his mind.

I thought maybe he was going to ask us some questions we might not be able to answer right.

'We will be gone in less than an hour,' I promised.

I could hardly wait to get out of the door. I felt as though I had a barrel of powder inside of me that was going to blow up any second. He motioned for us to go ahead. I took Sonia's hand. We went through the door and down the corridor to the steps that went down to the street.

We got out of the building into the fresh air of the street. The sun came down on our faces as gentle as the touch of the wind. I didn't know which way to go. We crossed the street and went along the side of the park till we came to the corner. When we turned up the street it brought us to the entrance of the park.

'We don't want to go in there!' Sonia exclaimed.

'No,' I replied.

I wanted to ask her a lot of questions, but I wanted to get outside of the town some place first. We went on up the street toward the church steeple.

'I'll have to ask someone which way to go,' I said.

We came to a butcher shop. I went inside and asked the man how to find the road that would lead to Kovno, but he couldn't understand what I was talking about. I came back out and we walked on up the street. A man was coming toward us on the sidewalk. He looked like a doctor. I stopped him.

'How do we find the road that goes to Kovno?' I asked in German.

He understood me.

'You turn to the right when you come to the church,' he replied, pointing up the street, 'and then you go two squares and turn to your left and follow the street on out.'

We thanked him and started on. I handed the ring to Sonia as we turned the corner, and she put it on.

'You didn't talk Polish while you were in jail, did you, Sonia?'

'I used Russian,' she replied.

'I thought you would,' I said. 'But I was using German all the time. I wonder why the captain didn't ask us why we were speaking different languages?'

'I hadn't thought of that,' Sonia answered. 'Maybe they didn't think we were important enough to bother with.'

'They brought a Polish fellow in yesterday.'

'What were they holding him for?'

'He was in a different cell from me.'

'This morning, before they took me up to let us go, they put a beautiful Russian girl in the room with me. They had got her while she was sitting in the park. She had beautiful black hair.'

'Why were they holding her?'

'I don't know. She wouldn't talk about it. I think she might have been some kind of spy. She said she had seen a lot of people roaming around trying to find a safe place to live. She knew I wasn't Russian, but she didn't tell them.'

'What were they going to do with her?'

'She said she didn't know.'

Sonia reached up into her hair and took out a comb and showed it to me. 'She gave me this,' she said.

As we had gone through the town I had seen a few soldiers in what must have been Lithuanian uniforms. They weren't Russian or Polish. The only thing I could think of was that they were organizing troops to protect their border. The Lithuanian government was never in sympathy with Poland. It could be that they were bringing troops to aid the Bolsheviks.

We had got to the road that was leading out of town. There were no houses in sight, so I stopped and put my arms around Sonia and kissed her.

'I love you, Sonia,' I said, and she whispered back the same thing and held me tighter. We were standing in the hot sun like that until we started walking on again without seeing the road we were walking on, or thinking about anything except each other.

The road was following a level crooked course through some low rolling hills that were under cultivation. The hills were yellow with grain and dotted with small bushy trees. In between the fields were pastures where cattle and horses and sheep were grazing. The air was quiet and the sun was warm. We went along feeling the freedom of walking together, able to look up at the blue sky and think of the things that were important to us and enjoy the sights of the peaceful countryside through which we were going.

'I think we shall like Kovno,' I asserted.

Sonia squeezed my hand. Her eyes were dreaming in the sky.

We came to a stream that crossed the road under a wooden bridge. It was flowing toward a patch of woods.

'Let's rest awhile,' Sonia suggested.

After we had crossed the bridge we turned off the road and followed the stream a little way through the trees till we came to a level grassy spot under a tree. Sitting down together we listened to the drowsy hum of contentment that was going on all around us.

There were birds going through the air and lighting in the tall bushes that were growing along the bank of the stream farther down. They would sweep up and light on the bushes and look around, swaying with the bush as it bent over with their weight. I kept my eye on them. Once in a while one of them would flutter down to the edge of the water to get a drink, ducking its head into the water and tilting its beak up to swallow. And then it would ruffle up its feathers and use its wings to beat the water around. Then it would shake the water off and fly away.

'Let's take a bath,' Sonia said.

I figured out a way to do it. I found two dead saplings and placed them across from bank to bank. When I had gathered a lot of tall bushes I took off my shoes, and when I had rolled up my pants legs I waded out into the water and stuck the bushes down into the sand between the two saplings so that they made a partition across the stream.

'We won't have to wait on each other,' I remarked.

I turned my head while she was undressing. When she stepped off into the water I heard her catch her breath

and begin splashing around. I took my clothes off and jumped in on the other side of the screen. The water was not deep enough for swimming. I lay down and got the water all over me, rubbing my slick body with the cold sand, rolling around to wash it off, feeling the nice free feeling of bathing.

'This is fine!' I shouted to Sonia. I didn't quite know whether I ought to talk to her like this or not, and to hide my embarrassment I stuck my mouth into the water and made a noise. I could hear her splashing around and laughing.

I lay in the water and looked up into the sky. My hands were on the bottom and I was floating in the slow current without feeling the weight of my body. I ducked my head under. Just as I brought it up I heard Sonia say something.

'What is it?'

'I think I'll wash our underclothes,' she said.

'All right. I'll get them and throw them over to you,' I answered.

I knew she wasn't looking, so I got out of the water and picked up the clothes. When I was in the water again I threw them over. I heard her rubbing and squeezing them, using the sand to get them clean. She rinsed them out, and when she said she was going to hang them on the bushes to dry I turned my head and waited till she got back into the water. I lay still with my head in the shallow water near the bank and dug my feet into the sand, feeling the water take the sand away from over my toes.

'If we lie still for a while the water will clear up, and then we can rinse off in clean water before we get out,' I told Sonia.

'I was just going to wash my hair,' she replied.

'Sure,' I said. 'Go ahead.' I wanted to see her hair when it was long and falling down her shoulders as it had been the first time I had seen her.

When she finished washing her hair I heard her get out of the water.

'Are the clothes dry?' I asked.

'Not quite, but we can put them on and let them dry the rest of the way on us.'

I waited awhile, and then she called, 'You can come out now, Wladek.'

She was sitting in the sun with her back to me drying her hair. I put the half-dry underclothes on and got into my clothes. After I had pulled the two saplings back from across the stream I lay down on the grass and watched Sonia as she combed her hair out to dry. At first the hair was wet and hung down into her lap like rope, and I could see her ears, but as she kept working with it her hair began to get lighter. Finally she had to stand up to keep it from dangling in the grass. The wind blew her hair out and whipped it around her like a fluttering golden flag. She caught it together and made the two long braids which she wound around her head. After she put the *busteczka* on we started back to the road.

'I don't need the bandage on my shoulder any more,' Sonia remarked. 'It's almost well.' She moved her arm about to show me.

'Did they see it in the jail?'

'Yes.'

'What did you tell them?'

'I said I was hooked by a cow. Did they notice the place on your head?'

'No. I don't even notice it myself any more.'

We turned into the road.

'I had an idea while we were taking the bath, Sonia. I am not going to steal or beg food any more,' I said. 'I am going to work for it. We don't have to be in such a hurry now. There is no one chasing us, so I can stop and ask someone to let me do some work for it.'

She nodded her head.

'We can keep on acting as if we had to talk with our fingers, and they won't get suspicious of us,' I explained.

'What kind of work did you do at home?' Sonia asked.

'My father was a cloth manufacturer in Kalish. I was just starting in to learn the business when I joined the army. I didn't have to do much work. I would go fishing with Josef every time I got the chance. I was having a good time when the war broke out.'

'Who is Josef? Is he your brother?'

'No. He was my best friend. He got killed in Ostroff.'

'You said you had three brothers.'

'My oldest brother, Felix, is a jewelry-maker in Switzerland. He left home a long time ago. The next one, Alex, has a photographing business in Strasbourg, and I have a small brother, Otto, at home. He was just starting in school. I don't think Felix or Alex came

back to fight. They were too well established where they are.'

'I had a little brother, but he died of smallpox when he was a baby,' Sonia said.

I thought of my little brother as we walked along. I remembered his brave little face scowling fiercely as he would march around the house shouting commands and imitating the actions of a soldier. He had seen us marching on the drill field. I saw the look on my mother's face as she watched him, the lip-drawn, anguished-eyed look. This would make my father go over and say, 'Be quiet now for a while, Otto.' That was the night before the day I went away.

After Otto had been sent to bed, and when everyone else was in bed, I had to go to my mother and tell her that I was going away. I remembered the one small sound she made in the dark as I kissed her quivering lips. Any man who had heard that sound is willing to kill any number of men if they are trying to invade his country.

'When we get to Kovno we will write to your father and mother and tell them we are all right,' I told Sonia.

'When we get to Kovno,' she repeated, and her eyes were shining. I kissed her as we walked, and we had to stop and kiss each other again.

The road was making a gradual climb into a wooded hill. The time we had spent bathing and washing the clothes had slipped by almost without my noticing it, and now I could see by the position of the sun that it was getting on toward evening. Above the tops of the trees,

as we came up to the crest of the hill, we could see smoke coming out of the chimney of a house. In a few minutes we could see the house through the trees. A man was out in front of it chopping wood. I motioned to Sonia as if I were talking with my hands, and she understood.

When we came up to the man he stopped chopping and spoke to us. I looked at Sonia and went through the motions with my fingers as though I were talking to her, and then I turned to him. I pointed to the axe and made out as if I were chopping wood, and then I pointed to my mouth and began chewing. He didn't seem to get it. I rubbed my stomach and pointed to my mouth again. A woman and two children came out of the house and he said something to her. They were all looking at us with a funny look on their faces.

I took the axe out of his hand and split a piece of the wood and then I pointed to my mouth and acted as though I were eating. The woman recognized what I wanted. She said something to the man and went into the house, the two young boys following her in, but looking back half curious and half afraid because of the unnatural way the thing was happening. The man nodded his head at me and I went to work chopping the wood.

In a few minutes the man's wife came back out with some bread and cheese. I paused for a minute and she handed the food to me. I took it and handed it over to Sonia and went back to chopping again. I noticed the two boys peeping out of the window at me, eyes and

mouths wide. It was funny, but I kept my face straight and worked harder with the axe.

Everyone was standing around with a serious expression on their faces watching me use the axe. I was working as hard as I could, to keep from laughing. When I had finished splitting the pile of wood I handed the axe to the man. I went up to Sonia and we bowed to them our thanks and they bowed to us and the children's eyes, looking at us from the window, were big and serious as we turned around and walked off down the road, going down the other side of the hill, looking back and waving to them as they began to carry the wood into the house.

I was afraid to look at Sonia till we were far enough away to be out of earshot, because I knew I should have to laugh if I did. It wasn't really funny, because these people had been very kind to us. The thing that made it funny was that it had all been done in such a serious way.

The road was following the downward slant of the ground. We went along eating the bread and cheese. An old man with a sack on his shoulder was coming up the road toward us. We nodded to him and passed on. The sun was sinking down in the distance. As the road began to level out at the bottom of the hill we saw that we were coming out into a series of cultivated fields. Moving across the fields, walking with their backs to us, we saw a few people leaving the fields, gathering in little groups and moving off down the road.

'There must be a village a little farther on,' I told Sonia. 'They are through work for the day.'

(TWO ALONE)

Sonia was peering ahead, trying to find the village. She slowed down and put her hand on my arm.

'Wladek,' she said, 'do you think we ought to go into the village?'

'Not if we can help it,' I answered. I had seen a barn of some kind out in the middle of one of the fields while we were still on the hill. It had looked like a good place to sleep for the night. 'We can slow up and wait till they have all gone. There is a barn in one of the fields we can sleep in,' I said.

By the time the barn was in sight it was almost dusk. We crossed the field. When we came to the barn Sonia stood outside while I went in to look around. There was straw all around on the floor. Old pieces of harness were hanging on the walls. A broken-down wagon was standing on one side. I called Sonia in. We piled some of the hay on the wagon-bed. We lay down and went to sleep in the hay.

CZTERNAŚCIE

WE WOKE UP IN TIME TO GET OUT OF THE BARN before the people came back to begin their work in the fields. It was early daylight. A thick heavy mist was everywhere. We were shivering. It was the coldness of the morning that had waked us up.

The cold white mist settled on our clothes as we walked along the road, forming little beads of water which we had to shake off. We couldn't brush it off with our hands because that would burst the beads and make them soak down into the cloth.

It was hard to see very far ahead, and we found ourselves already in the village before we knew it. We passed the warm-looking yellow lamplit windows of the village without seeing anyone, and kept on following the road as it continued through the fields that lay on the other side of the village.

The walking warmed everything but our hands and faces, but after a while the sun began to break through and spread its warmth around. This caused the mist to disappear as the sky changed to a bright blue. In the distance on each side I could see low blue hills, but all

around us the plowed brown earth stretched out flat and level, broken only now and then by a group of trees around a farmhouse or a barn. Sonia had not said anything since she had waked me up, but now and then she would hold my hand a little tighter and look at me, and this was enough words for me.

'I will arrange to get something to eat after a while,' I said.

'They are harvesting potatoes,' she replied.

We had seen a few people bending over and picking them up as they followed along behind a man who was following a horse and plow. They were out in the middle of the field. As we passed on we began to see more people working in the fields. Occasionally a wagon loaded with sacks of potatoes would pass us. We would stop and wave at the driver as he went by without asking him for a ride.

The day was getting warm and we were beginning to get tired. I had found six potatoes that had fallen off the wagons as we walked along. When we came to a small stream we turned off to one side to rest and eat. One of the guards in the jail had given me some matches when he had given me a cigarette, and I still had a few of the matches left. I gathered some sticks and built a fire to bake the potatoes.

We sat in the shade of a tree, away from the heat of the fire, waiting for the wood to burn itself into live coals so that we could begin to bake the potatoes.

'How long did we walk from the time we swam the river till they put us in jail?' Sonia asked.

I knew what she was trying to figure out. She wanted to know how long it was going to be till we got to Kovno.

'We walked two whole days and part of one night, I said.

'Do you know what I think we ought to do, Wladek?'

'What?'

'Let's keep on walking without stopping till we get there. I mean just taking naps and going on again. How long do you think it would take us if we did that?'

'We might make it by tomorrow night if we did that, I replied.

'Do you want to do that?' Sonia asked.

'You bet.'

I got up and put the potatoes in the hot ashes. When I sat down again, Sonia said: 'Were we in jail three days, or was it four? It seems as if it was a lot longer than that.'

'They let us out on the third day.'

'Just think, we should already have been in Kovno by now.'

I could see that she was already beginning to dream too much, but I didn't have the heart to remind her that we couldn't expect much better in Kovno than what we had already been getting along the road. The main thing about being in Kovno was that we shouldn't be so conspicuous. A large city, especially where it is also the capital city, has many different nationalities in it, and you can be a stranger to someone without his getting suspicious of you.

We sat and waited for the potatoes. We hadn't said anything for quite a while.

'They ought to be done,' I said at last.

I raked them out of the ashes with a stick and let them lie awhile to cool. We could see the road from where we were sitting. Every so often a wagon would pass loaded with sacks. Sonia picked up one of the hot potatoes and had to drop it.

'I wish I could see a load of salt coming along,' Sonia remarked.

'How about a cow with a bucket hanging on its neck?' I asked.

'I would trade a little of the salt to the cow for a little milk,' she replied.

I broke open a potato to make it cool faster, but I couldn't wait long enough. It was still hot. When I bit into it I had to begin chewing fast and suck air in and out to keep it from burning my mouth.

'I didn't need any salt to get that down,' I said.

'What makes potatoes so hot?' Sonia asked, laughing.

'They are mad because they haven't any salt,' I answered.

After we finished eating, I put the fire out and we started off along the road again, feeling fine because of having rested, also because we had eaten while we were resting. The potato wagons were coming and going along the road. We would stand aside to let them go by, waving to the drivers a greeting without using our voices or asking them for a ride. I picked up every loose potato

I could find along the road and put it in my pocket. As long as this luck was holding out I knew I should not have to stop and work for our food. Later in the day I found a piece of old sack. With this I made a bundle of the potatoes, hanging it over my shoulder on a stick. By nightfall I had enough food in the bundle to last us till we arrived in Kovno.

We stopped when it got dark and ate again and then continued on along in the night, stopping every three or four hours to rest for a while and then going on again. We watched the sun come up red in the east and make the day warm and bright again. By this time we were out of the potato-growing district. The countryside was still flat and level. Most of the crops in the fields had been wheat, and now the people were out in their fields scattering manure and plowing up the stubble so that the ground would be ready, after the winter's rest, for the new seeds in the spring.

At noon we stopped by a small stream and ate again. We could see each village in time to circle around it, coming back to the road again on the other side and keeping up our pace. We could feel the silent excitement of getting nearer to the large city, where we could walk along without feeling that we were the target for the gazing of suspicious eyes. The houses along the road were becoming larger and better kept. Each turn in the road made us anxious to get to it so that we could see what was ahead of us.

We stopped to rest for a while in a small grove of trees by the road. I put the bundle of potatoes on the ground

and sat back against the trunk of a tree. The sun had already begun to go down. The sky in the west was like a great sea of fire. There was a house standing across the road on a hill. Its windows looked like open ovens because of the way the sun was striking them.

'We could eat now,' I suggested. 'I've got one more match left.'

'I'm too excited to eat,' Sonia replied. 'We can't be very far away from Kovno. The houses along the road are too close together for us to be very far away.'

'We shall know when we get to Kovno,' I said, 'because we have to cross the Niemen River just before we get into the town. I have seen it on the map.'

'A river. Another river to swim!'

'There ought to be a bridge, and this time we're not crossing a border. It's all the same country, so we ought not to have any trouble.'

'I'm rested if you are,' Sonia said.

We got up to go. A wagon and team were coming along the road from the direction we were going. We waved at the man driving as he passed, and then we continued on along the road. We walked for about an hour after the sun had gone down. The dusk was beginning to change into darkness. The sky was clear without any moon. Lights were in all the windows of the houses we passed.

I saw something ahead on the road. It was too dark to see exactly what it was. We passed a little group of houses that were alongside of the road. After we had gone a little farther I saw that what I had seen in the

road was a bridge. We were coming to the river. It was a large bridge, larger than the one we had seen at the border. As we got closer we could see the river. It looked almost like a wide wheatfield stretching out below each side of the bridge. Along the bank on the right we could just make out some small wooden wharves with a few fishing-boats tied up by them. A short distance up the bank from the wharves were a few fishermen's shacks. There was a light in one of the shacks.

We started across the bridge, but suddenly a guard with a rifle on his shoulder stepped out from a little house that was on one side of the bridge. He came up to me and said something. I couldn't understand him, but I knew what he wanted. He wanted to see my papers. I was surprised that a guard should be stationed here, but it was too late to do anything about it. I made some signs to Sonia as though I were talking to her with my fingers, and then I began to search through my clothes as though I were looking for my papers. When I couldn't find them I made some more motions to Sonia and she made some motions back to me. We looked at the guard and shook our heads.

He was watching us without saying anything. I shook my head and pointed back in the direction from which we had come to explain to him that we had forgotten the papers. He asked me something, but I shook my head and made some more signs at him. He was just standing and looking at us, and when I started to go on across the bridge he grabbed me by the shoulder

and yanked me back. He said something and pointed back up the road.

I made out as though I didn't understand, so he gave me a little push and motioned for us to go back. I nodded my head as if I understood what he meant, and we walked back off the bridge and on up the road till we were out of his sight.

We turned off to the left after we had passed the little group of houses.

'I was afraid the guard was going to hold us and put us in jail,' Sonia whispered.

'Maybe they just don't let you use the bridge at night,' I said.

'Then all we have to do is wait till morning,' Sonia said.

'I said *maybe*,' I replied.

We could see the river from where we stood. I knew we couldn't swim it.

'Did you see those boats down by the bank awhile ago?'

'Yes,' she answered. She hesitated. 'What are you going to do?'

'Let's go down and see if they are locked.'

'The guard will see us.'

'He will think we are fishermen.'

'Do you fish at night?'

'Sure.'

We were going past a row of shacks that led off down toward the boats. When we had got past the last shack we met someone coming toward us. I took a chance and

greeted the man in German. He stopped. He was a young fellow. I could see that he understood me, but he was trying to see who I was.

'How is the fishing?' I asked.

'My luck is at the bottom of the river,' he replied. He wasn't speaking German very well, but I could understand him.

'That's too bad,' I said. 'They say there are a hundred fish for every hook.'

'That explains it,' he returned. 'I must be on my second hundred.'

I laughed. 'Do you have a boat?'

'Do you want to go fishing?'

'Not exactly,' I replied.

He hesitated.

'We want to go for a ride,' I explained.

He looked at Sonia. She had been standing a little in back of me and he had not had a chance to see her very well.

'Oh,' he said.

I reached back and took Sonia by the hand. I was trying to slip the ring off her finger. It didn't want to come off easily, but she worked it free for me.

'What would you charge us?' I asked.

'Four marks.'

He seemed to have a standard price. I didn't know how much four marks was, but I let on as though I understood.

'Do you have a sweetheart?' I inquired.

'What does that have to do with it?'

'Maybe you would like to give her this ring.' I held it up for him to see.

'I can't see a bargain in the dark,' he said.

'Hold it while I light a match,' I ordered. I handed the sack of potatoes I was carrying to Sonia, and picking up a small rock, I struck a match and cupped it in my hands. He held the ring up close to the match to look it over.

'It's gold,' I stated.

'It looks all right,' he admitted, but he hesitated.

The match went out.

'You can't buy it for four marks,' I said.

I was looking into his face. There was a shrewd smile coming around his mouth.

'Do you want to go all the way across?' he asked. The tone of voice he had used when he had said 'all the way across' told me more than the words did. This was not the first time he had rowed someone across the river in the dark, and he knew he could name his own price.

'If we got out on the other side it would be easier for you to row back,' I pointed out. I let my voice play the same game he was playing. I made up something else to make him think he was making a nice bargain for himself. 'You understand how it is,' I said. 'We visited friends in the country, and now we have to get back before it is too late.'

He looked over at the bridge and smiled his sly smile.

'We don't like to walk across bridges,' I said, and smiled back at him. 'Is night fishing very profitable?' I added.

'Sometimes it is,' he replied. And then he asked, 'What have you got in that bundle?'

I was willing to give him the potatoes too. 'Potatoes,' I said.

'Potatoes,' he repeated. 'I like potatoes.'

'These are very nice potatoes,' I replied. I waited a second and then I said, 'I will give them to you as we ride along in the boat.'

'You are very kind,' he answered.

'Not at all. I am sure you will give us a pleasant ride.'

I could see that he was thinking he had made a nice bargain for himself. We had both been *very* very polite to each other, and I had let all the satisfaction go to him. He stuck the ring in his pocket.

'It's too bad there isn't any moon,' he remarked as he turned off to go down to the boat.

'I was just thinking the same thing,' I answered.

'Watch out for the loose boards,' he warned as we came out on the short wharf.

He unlocked the chain around the forward end of the boat without making much noise, and after we got in, he shoved off and brought the bow around by working his left oar. We sat in the forward seat facing him as he pulled out into the river. I could feel each small spurt as he leaned back on the oars. The river was flowing toward the bridge, but he kept the prow at an upriver angle.

As we crept out into the channel we began to bounce a little as the small waves splashed against the side of the boat. He wasn't having an easy time of it. I started

to tell him I would take his place for a while, but I kept silent because I didn't want to distract his attention from the oars. I wanted to get across as quickly as possible and he seemed to have plenty of strength.

I began to think that this *człowiek* might really be taking us to a guard station on the other side. He seemed to have an honest face, all right, but it is not so hard for an honest man to be dishonest to a stranger if he is suspicious of him.

We were getting close enough to see the opposite bank. It was level and sandy. I could see that he was pulling up ahead of the place where he wanted to land so that he could run the boat up on the sand. When he had got far enough upstream to turn downstream he swung the bow around, and then he motioned for us to change to the stern of the boat so that the prow would be lifted. He began rowing again, and with the aid of the current he ran aground high enough for us to step out onto the sand without getting our feet wet. He let us pass him, and we stepped off.

The prow was still holding, and I started to give him a shove.

'Wait,' he said. 'I want to rest awhile.'

I stood back and took Sonia by the hand. I didn't want to hurry off because I didn't want him to get suspicious. He took out a package of cigarettes.

'Have a cigarette,' he offered.

I didn't wait for him to offer it a second time. 'Thanks,' I said. 'I haven't had a smoke since this morning.'

It was nice to smoke a cigarette again. I took it out of my mouth and looked at it. I decided to smoke about half of it and then tell him I had to go, so that after I was out of his sight I could pinch it out and smoke the other half later on. It was too much of a luxury to smoke it all at one time.

I took a few more puffs and then I said, 'I'd like to buy you a drink before we go, but there isn't any place near by.'

'I could beach the boat and we could go on into town,' he suggested.

I saw that I had said too much. Sonia had squeezed my arm tightly. He was about to get out of the boat.

'No,' I said. 'I've got a better idea. I'll be over in a few days and I'll bring a bottle and we will go fishing.'

'Will you do that?'

'Sure.'

He paused a minute, blowing the smoke out slowly.

'Maybe I ought to give you back the potatoes,' he said.

'You don't have to do that,' I replied, but I let the tone of my voice give him the idea that it would be all right if he did.

He reached over and handed the bundle to me. 'Here, you take them with you,' he said.

'Well, if you say so,' I answered.

I took the sack and set it down on the sand.

'I guess we had better be going,' I suggested.

'Give me a little push,' he said.

I shoved him off of the sand, and he began to turn out into the river.

'Come over any time,' he invited, turning around.

'Sure,' I said. 'Good-bye.' I waved my hand at him as if I were an old friend.

'Good-bye,' he replied.

I picked up the potatoes and we went across the sand till we came into a field that was grown up with weeds. I stopped and pinched out the fire of the cigarette and stuck it in my shirt-pocket. After we had crossed the field we could see the lights of some houses. There was a wide gap between two of the houses, and going through this we reached the street. It ran parallel to the way the river had been going. There were street lamps along the sidewalk. Several people were walking along the street. Most of them seemed to be going to the left, so we turned that way and walked along holding each other's hands.

'I thought it would be night-time when we got here,' Sonia was saying, 'but I didn't think I was going to be afraid. I am afraid, Wladek.'

'What are you afraid of?' I asked.

The same feeling was in me. It was the difference between us and the people who were already here. There was nothing here that belonged to us. No one here knew anything about us. We couldn't speak their language. We were going along the street of a strange city. All we had was a few potatoes hanging on my shoulder in a bundle. The people in this city ate three meals a

day, slept in a bed each night in their houses, bought and sold things to each other, laughed and talked and enjoyed themselves. They didn't know us. We were strangers. It was no concern of theirs whether we lived or died.

Sonia was holding me tightly by the arm. She pulled it to make me look at her. 'I feel as if something big and powerful was laughing at me, and there was nothing I could do about it,' she said. 'Do you feel that way, Wladek?'

I didn't want to say 'Yes.' I was feeling the same way, but I didn't let myself say so. I looked around as though I were trying to see what it was she was afraid of.

'I don't see anything so big,' I said. 'This place is just a lot of people and houses and streets. They can't do anything to us.'

We were beginning to come into the business section of Kovno. On each side of the street were shops with their doors open. People were going in and out. We could hear them speaking all sorts of languages. We could smell the horses that were out in the street pulling the wagons and carriages. There seemed to be a lot of things going on. I wondered what day of the week it was. I knew it wasn't Sunday because there were so many wagons going up and down the street.

I wanted to cheer Sonia up, so I said, 'Show me which one of these people is laughing at you and I'll break him in two.' I was speaking Polish so she would believe that I was not afraid of anything. 'How about that one over there?' I pointed to a little old fellow who was bouncing

along like a goat as he walked. I was trying to make her laugh, but she didn't see the joke.

'It's not just one of them, it's all of them together,' she said.

I patted her on the shoulder. We had stopped in front of a tailor shop to look around. There was no use in keeping on up the street. The buildings were getting taller and the street more crowded with people. I wanted to find a place where Sonia and I could eat and sleep, and you can't do that on a crowded street. I didn't know what to do. I knew that among all these people there ought to be one who was kind enough to help us, but you can't tell whether someone is kind or not till you find out, and the only way you can find out is to ask. Almost anyone will be kind to you if you pay them for it. But all I had to pay them with was a bundle of potatoes.

'There's no use standing here all night,' I told Sonia.

'What are we going to do?'

I could feel her trembling as she held my arm.

'Let's go back out to the riverbank and wait till morning,' she suggested. 'Maybe we can find an old house or something.'

We had got inside of the city where there were a lot of people. I didn't want to have to come back into it all over again. I didn't like the feeling it gave me. I didn't want to be alone away from everything. It was too much like being an animal. I had confidence that there was a place here for us. Somehow I knew we could find it now

just as well as any other time. I could look at these people and tell that they weren't out to hurt anybody.

'If we go back out of the city now we shall just have to come back in again anyway,' I said. 'Let's just see if we can't talk to someone. It won't hurt to talk to them.'

I looked into the tailor shop in front of which we were standing. An old man was sitting on a table working on a garment. The light of the lamp hanging above him was shining down on the top of his slick bald head. He was bent down over his work and I could see only a small part of his face. His hands were gesturing over the cloth, pulling and tucking in short, neat little motions.

Just as we walked inside we saw a young girl come through a door in the rear of the shop. The old man hadn't looked up yet, but he lifted his head and stopped working when the girl spoke to us.

'Good evening,' she said. She was speaking Russian. 'You will have to talk to me,' she said, 'because my father is deaf.'

I let Sonia reply because her Russian was better than mine.

'Tell her we are strangers here and are looking for a place to eat and sleep,' I suggested.

When Sonia told the girl this the old man turned to his daughter and asked her what we had said. He asked her what it was we wanted to buy. She lifted her hand for him to wait a minute, and then she went to the door with us and started to point down the street.

'Maybe he wants to buy a coat,' the old fellow was saying.

The daughter turned around and told him we were looking for a place to spend the night.

'Well, tell him I can make him a perfect fit any time he wants to come in,' he replied.

She smiled at us. 'My father is proud of his work,' she said.

'It's too bad he is deaf,' Sonia remarked.

'It was caused by a sickness,' the girl answered.

She started to point again, but she stopped and asked, 'Am I too inquisitive in asking you where you are from?'

'Tell her we came all the way from Olita,' I said in Polish to Sonia.

'I can understand a little Polish,' the girl told me. 'My mother came from Poland.' She spoke to Sonia. 'I could tell that you were not Russian. My father taught me to speak Russian.'

'What is it?' the old man asked. He seemed to be able to catch some of his daughter's words.

She turned back to him. 'I was talking to these people,' she said, and he went back to his work.

'I thought you might be Polish,' she continued, 'and the reason I wanted to find out is because the man who runs the stable yard and inn down the street is also from Poland. He is a friend of my father's, and he can put you up for the night.'

'But we didn't come in a wagon,' Sonia said. 'We walked.'

'You didn't walk from Olita!'

'Yes,' I answered. 'We like to walk. *Don't* we?' I asked Sonia, smiling.

'Oh, yes,' Sonia replied.

'You must have had a lot of fun,' the girl said, in a slightly unconvincing tone.

'It was fine,' I assured her. 'But where is the place of the fellow you were telling us about? Perhaps I could look him up later on.'

'It's right down there,' she responded, pointing at a big frame structure with a large doorway cut out in the center of it for wagons to go through. I could see that it was a large inn and stableyard, with a café on one side.

'Thanks very much,' I said.

As we went out the door I could hear the girl trying to explain to her father what we had wanted.

We came to the large entrance and looked in. There was a row of stalls going all around the dark enclosure. Horses were in most of the stalls. The wagons were left standing in the center of the roofless stable yard. About halfway down the right side was an entrance to the café. There was also a window through which we could see into the eating-place. As we went toward the door I stopped to look at one of the empty stalls. The ground was covered with straw. It was clean enough to sleep in.

Just then the door opened and a big tall man came out. When he saw us standing by the stall he came over.

'What can I do for you?' he said, and then I knew he was the owner of the place.

'We should like to have one of these stalls for the night,' I said in Polish.

'Fine,' he replied. 'Bring your team on in.'

'We haven't got a team,' I explained. 'We want to sleep here. I can give you this sack of potatoes in payment,' I assured him.

He paused a minute and looked at us.

'My sister and I have just come into town,' I added. 'We haven't any money to pay you, but if you will take these potatoes ——'

'Wait a minute,' he said. The light from the window was shining on us. He was scratching his head. 'Did you say you wanted to sleep in the stall?'

'Yes.'

'Well, now' — he paused again, looking us over — 'I can't let you do that. No, you come inside a minute.'

We passed through the door into the café. The room was large and well lighted. A few people were sitting at the tables eating and drinking and talking. You could tell that they were from out of the city because of their clothes and the way they looked as they talked with one another. The café owner motioned for us to sit down at an empty table. He looked to be a man well past middle age. His hair was gray, but his eyes were alive with interest as he looked at us. There was kindness in his face.

'I have never heard of such a thing,' he declared, referring to the conversation we had just had in the stable yard. 'You don't look like people who go around

sleeping in horse stalls. Have you come from Poland? I am from Posen myself.'

I spoke up. 'My sister and I are from the village of Godsz. I am trying to get my sister safely away from the war.'

He stopped me with a look. 'How did you ever get this far?' He was leaning over on his elbows.

'We had to walk,' I said.

I looked around. The people had heard us talking and they were all staring at us. Sonia was beginning to blush, and this was bringing out the beauty of her face.

'It's amazing!' he exclaimed. 'Why did you come to Kovno? Are your parents alive?'

'I don't know,' I said. 'It depends on how the war is going. I thought that if we got here I could find some way to make a living,' I added, answering his questions.

'When did you eat last?' the innkeeper was asking. 'But wait. I was just going to eat. You can have something with me.'

'Bring us some tea, Emma!' he shouted.

'I have no money,' I reminded him, 'but I will do anything to pay you.'

'Let tomorrow take care of itself,' he replied. 'Tonight you can eat with me. What is your name?'

'Stanislaw. She is Sonia and I am Wladek.'

'They call me Karlos.' He reached over to shake hands.

A large plump woman brought the tea and poured it out in large cups for us. As she was going away Karlos said, 'Bring us a meal, Emma.' He looked at Sonia and

there was a twinkle in his eyes. 'If your sister has an appetite that is anything like her face, I am sure she will be able to take care of a little food.'

Sonia blushed even deeper and leaned over toward me, and the whole place was filled with laughter. The woman brought in the food, a large dish of meat, some cabbage, and bread and cheese.

'This ought to keep your sister from talking so much,' Karlos said.

Before we had finished eating Karlos got up and explained that he had to go and see about something. When he came back I said, 'We thank you for all this that you have done, and as soon as I can I will repay you.' Most of the patrons of the café were gone, and the place was quiet except for the occasional sounds made by the horses in the stalls outside. I stood up. 'You can be sure we shall not forget to come back.'

'But where are you going at this time of night?'

'We can't impose on you for anything else,' I replied. 'You have been too good to us already.'

'Nonsense, if you will pardon the expression,' Karlos replied. 'You are my countryman. Come on upstairs and I will show you a place where you can sleep to-night.'

I looked at Sonia. 'This is too much to ask of you,' I said.

'It is nothing. I have a small attic room over the café that I used to let a fellow have for nothing. He is gone now, so you can have it. You see I don't mind helping people who look all right. It is the sort of thing I do.'

If you want to pay me I will let you work around the place. How is that?’

‘I know how to handle horses,’ I replied.

‘Then follow me.’

Taking a lamp in his hand, Karlos led the way out of the eating-place to a narrow hallway that went along the wall next to the stables. We came to a door and followed him up the staircase. At the top Karlos opened a door. We saw a small room. The floor was bare. On one side there was a dresser with the mirror gone. A small white-painted iron bed stood along the wall, and at its foot was a large wooden trunk. There was a straight chair standing in front of a small iron heating stove.

Karlos set the lamp down on the dresser. ‘You can sleep here,’ he told us. He turned back the covers of the bed. ‘One of you can sleep on a pallet on the floor,’ he added.

‘Oh, yes, there are plenty of quilts there,’ I observed.

I set the bundle of potatoes on the floor in one corner. Karlos was just going out the door.

‘Good night,’ he said.

‘We’ll see you in the morning,’ I answered.

He closed the door and we heard him going down the stairs.

We looked around the room. It was a nice feeling to be standing inside of a building, protected from the weather, knowing also that we were at the end of a journey, and that we were safe, and still together. I thought, for a moment, that maybe this fellow was

playing a trick on us. Maybe right now he was on his way to the authorities; but then I remembered his face and the way he had looked at us as he spoke to us, and I knew that he was not that kind of man. There had been a certain sincerity in his voice that had led me to trust him. There is always something about the manners of an evil man that will give him away. I did not feel afraid to trust Karlos.

Sonia was still standing where she had stood when Karlos had closed the door. I knew she was a little uncertain as to what to do. The room was slightly chilly. I saw a small box by the stove and it had a few sticks of wood in it. I found some matches on the dresser and began to make a fire in the stove. Sonia was watching me. I stood up when I had finished and looked at her. She was looking straight into my eyes, and I could feel the strange bright feeling that two people share when they look at each other and are aware of the existence of love between them. I went up and took hold of her hand. She held mine firmly.

'I will make a pallet for myself on the floor in front of the stove,' I said.

She let go of my hand and kissed me gently on the lips.

PIETNAŚCIE

I WAS RESTLESS. I COULDN'T SLEEP. I WOULD wake up with a start and look around to see if everything was all right. It was comfortable lying between the quilts on the pallet, but I couldn't get rid of the uneasy feeling of being in a strange place. I had got used to not trusting anyone, and now the tight nervousness of it wouldn't loosen up. I knew we were safe here, but the tenseness would knot up anyway.

I could hear Sonia move around on the bed. Once in a while she would moan softly in her sleep. The fire in the stove had gone out and the room was cold. From where I lay I could see the small window behind the stove. It was still dark outside. I wanted to sit up and smoke the last half of the cigarette I had in my pocket, but I was afraid I should wake Sonia up if I did.

The next time I woke up I jerked myself out of a dream. I thought I was about to bring the rock down on the fellow's head who was under the wagon sleeping, but I thought it was I that was going to get hit. I woke up in a cold sweat, with the crunching sound the rock had made in my ears. The shock of waking up like that made

me feel weak. I lay there in a sick feeling of relief, quivering, unable to make myself stop shaking. I was wide awake, and I knew I couldn't go back to sleep again.

I could hear Sonia breathing slowly and deeply in her sleep. I listened to the slow quiet sounds she was making and tried to smooth out the kinked-up feeling. She was close to me. There was no long journey ahead of us. We were through with getting up and going along a road. No more starving. No more begging and stealing.

I had been looking out of the window. Suddenly I was aware that it was almost daylight outside. I heard a wagon go by in the street. I began to listen. There were sounds coming from all over the house. I sat up and put my clothes on. Standing up, I looked out of the window. A dog in a back yard was barking at a cat on a fence. The houses were crowded close together. Most of the windows were still shuttered. A heavy mist kept me from seeing much of the town. Smoke was coming out of the chimneys.

I stepped back to look at Sonia. She was still asleep. The covers were tucked up under her chin and she was lying on her side in such a way that I could see only one side of her face. Her lips were slightly parted. The mass of golden hair was swept back, exposing one small pink ear and the delicate shape of her head. Her eyes seemed ready to open at any second, and I stood there almost breathless waiting for it to happen. Her eyes flickered once, but she didn't wake up; she turned over and curled herself up on the other side so that she was facing

the wall with her back to me. And then she woke up suddenly.

When she turned and saw me looking at her she lay down again and began to laugh in a relieved sort of way.

'I was dreaming,' she explained. 'It was a bad dream. I thought they had found us hiding behind the horse that had broken its legs. And then I woke up.'

'I don't mind letting them catch us in a dream,' I said.

'They were all aiming at you, and all I could do was hold on to the horse's tail. I couldn't seem to do anything. Something wouldn't let me move. I tried to scream, but my mouth wouldn't work. I have never had such a terrible feeling, Wladek.'

'You didn't look as though you were having a bad dream,' I remarked. 'I watched you a little while just before you woke up.'

As soon as I had the fire built I went to the window and stood with my back to the room. The sun was breaking through the mist. A man came out of the little outhouse in his back yard. As he reached the kitchen door he met his son coming out holding up his pants. I heard Sonia get out of bed and slip into her clothes. She came over and put her hand on my shoulder. I turned around and kissed her.

'Wladek, what are we going to do now?'

'I'm going to talk to Karlos as soon as we go downstairs.'

'Do you think he is up yet?'

'You straighten out the room. I'll go down and see.'

The door that opened out into the stable yard from the hallway was right opposite the door that went into the café. There was also a window in the side of the hall which let you see out into the yard. I looked out to see if Karlos was outside. He wasn't, so I went on into the café.

Four men were standing by the stove talking to Karlos. I walked up to them and we all said good morning. I coul^d hear Emma working out in the kitchen, so I asked Karlos in a low voice where the toilet was. He took me to the window and showed me a passageway in the corner of the yard.

'It's the first door to the right,' he explained.

When I went back up to the room Sonia was standing by the door to see who was coming up. She was combing her hair.

'You look fine,' I said.

'Did you see Karlos?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'Come on down and I'll show you where the outhouse is.'

We went down the stairs together. I took her out into the yard and over to the passage.

'It's the second door on the right. I'll get some water for us to wash in,' I said.

As I went back into the café Karlos was just sitting down to eat breakfast. When he saw me he looked behind me to see if Sonia was coming.

'She will be down in a few minutes,' I told him. 'I was just looking for a little water to wash our faces.'

'Oh, sure,' he said. He turned and called Emma.

'Give this lad a kettle of water and a towel,' he ordered.

I started back toward the kitchen.

'Well, how did you sleep? And how is your sister this morning?' Karlos asked.

He had seemed to pause just before he said the word 'sister,' and I thought I could catch a little note in his voice that was like the wink a man gives when he thinks he knows something that someone else thinks is a secret. I passed it up for the moment, but I decided to tell him the truth as soon as I got a proper chance. I didn't want to deceive him, because I knew I could trust him.

'We are both fine,' I replied. 'As soon as you have a few spare moments I should like to talk to you,' I added. I tried to say the word 'talk' in a manner that would give him the idea that I wanted to let him in on the secret.

'I think we can arrange it,' he replied.

Emma was coming toward me with the kettle, her large breasts bulging out above the apron which was pulled tightly around her large stomach. A large clean white house cap covered her head. She was smiling at me. I could tell she was German.

'*Guten morgen*,' I said.

She raised her eyebrows in a surprised look, and replied, '*Sprechen sie deutsch?*'

'*Ja, ja.*'

'But Karlos told me you and your sister were Polish like him,' she continued in German.

'Germany has been in control of our town two or three times,' I replied.

'And the Russians had it the rest of the time,' Karlos put in.

'Poland has had a terrible time,' Emma said sadly.

'A Pole must fight even for the use of his tongue,' I answered.

'Or lose the use of his head too,' Karlos remarked, laughing.

I took the kettle in my hand and hung the towel on my shoulder.

'Come down to breakfast as soon as you are washed,' Karlos called as I was going through the door.

I stuck my head back in: 'We'll be right down.'

As I went into the room I saw a washpan on the dresser that I hadn't noticed before. Sonia came in. I was just beginning to pour some water into the pan.

'Wait,' she said. 'I will pour the water over your hands, and you can pour it over my hands. There's no place up here where we can empty the pan.'

'Karlos said for us to come down and have breakfast,' I told Sonia as she was pouring the water.

'I need a shave,' I said.

'This is almost like home,' Sonia declared. 'I mean I feel all right here,' she explained.

'I think he knows you are not my sister, Sonia.'

'How did he find out?'

I dried my face. 'He didn't find out. He just thinks it.'

'He has been so nice to us. Maybe we could just tell him.'

'That's what I'm going to do.'

I poured the water for Sonia. When she had dried her face we went back downstairs. As we came to the door of the café Sonia hung back a little so that she would be behind me as we went through the door.

Karlos was standing by the stove talking to a tall, dark, Russian-looking fellow. There was no one else in the place.

'Sit down over there' — Karlos pointed to a table — 'and I'll tell Emma to bring it in,' he said.

'Oh, I'll go and help her,' Sonia offered, and fled into the kitchen.

'I want to do something for all these things you are doing for us,' I said.

'We will fix that up after a while.'

Karlos was just about to say something else when the fellow he was talking to pinched his arm and pulled him aside.

'Excuse me,' he said, and turned to the man.

Sonia and Emma came in with the food. There was a platter of sausage and eggs, and bread and butter and coffee. Sonia sat down and we began to eat.

'I'm going to pinch myself after I get through eating,' I told Sonia. 'I want to see if I am dreaming.'

SZESNAŚCIE

SONIA HAD CLEARED AWAY THE BREAKFAST dishes and was wiping off the table with a wet rag. I was standing with my back to the stove smoking the last half of the cigarette the fisherman had given me. The fellow who had pulled Karlos aside a few minutes before Sonia and I had sat down to eat breakfast was still talking to Karlos. They came back over to the stove.

'Wladek, I want you to meet Nicholas Rasumoff, a good friend of mine,' Karlos said. 'Wladek Stanislow,' he continued, repeating my name to his friend.

'I'm glad to meet you,' I said, shaking his hand. I could tell that he was not one of Karlos' guests because he did not look like a fellow who was from the country. His boots were well kept and he was clean-shaven. He was one of those large rawboned Russians. He was sizing me up with his shrewd snapping black eyes, and I was doing the same thing. The way in which they had suddenly walked over toward me had given me the idea that Karlos and this fellow had made up some sort of proposition which they were about to let me in on.

'Karlos tells me that you are recently from Poland,'

Rasumoff said. He wasn't speaking Polish very well, but I could understand him.

'That's right.'

'He tells me you are looking for something to do.'

Rasumoff was looking at Karlos and nodding his head and Karlos was looking at me and nodding and I was nodding at Rasumoff, all at the same time.

'What kind of work do you do?' Rasumoff continued.

'I can do a lot of things,' I said.

'Can you handle a wagon and team?'

'That's one of the things I do best.'

Sonia had gone back into the kitchen. Rasumoff glanced around, and then moved a little closer to me.

'How would you like to drive a wagon for me once in a while?'

'Why not all the time?' I asked.

'I would pay you as much to drive once in a while as some other fellow would if you were driving all the time.'

I noticed the significance in his voice. I hesitated long enough to look at Karlos. He squinched his mouth and lifted his shoulders in such a way as to say that it was all up to me.

'You can work around the place here while you are not driving,' Karlos offered.

There wasn't much choice. The man was asking me to drive a wagon and he was hinting that there was a risk to it. I knew he wouldn't tell me what the risk was till I accepted.

'What do you pay?'

'Ten marks a trip.'

'How many trips a week?'

'It varies. Maybe one, maybe two. Maybe more.'

I couldn't complain about the pay, but I decided to see if he would pay more. I wanted to see how big the risk was.

'How about twelve marks a trip?'

'I will pay you ten,' he said definitely.

There wasn't much else to say. I knew that he knew that I was going to say 'Yes' all the time.

'When do I begin?'

'Day after tomorrow.'

We all seemed to relax a little. I knew that I had a way to make some money. Rasumoff had found someone to take the job off his hands. Karlos had helped me to find a way to make some money, and in doing so he had helped Rasumoff, who was also his friend.

'You didn't tell me what was going to be in the wagon,' I pointed out.

'Come on over to my house,' Rasumoff rejoined.

'Where do you live?'

'Right next door,' Karlos informed me.

'I run the little shop on the other side of the stable yard,' Rasumoff explained.

We went through the door and out into the yard. Rasumoff pointed to a wagon and team that was standing already hitched up. There were two large black horses. One of them had a white diamond just above his eyes; the other was solid black. They were beautiful horses. The wagon was loaded with a few boxes and barrels.

'That's my outfit,' Rasumoff said.

'I thought you said I was to begin day after tomorrow.'

'You do,' he said. 'This is not the kind of stuff I want you to take.'

We went out of the large gateway and turned into the door of Rasumoff's shop. A woman was standing behind the counter. There was candy and tobacco on the shelves behind the counter. Rasumoff introduced me to his wife.

'Tania, this is Wladek Stanislow. He is going to help me with the driving.'

She nodded her head at me.

'I thought you were already gone,' she said to Rasumoff.

'I'll be on my way in a few minutes,' he answered as we followed him back into his kitchen. There was something not quite right with the way they had talked to each other. There was something cool and distant in their voices. I saw Karlos glance at me to see if I had noticed it.

We sat down at the table. Rasumoff reached up and took a bottle off a shelf. When he had placed it on the table he put his hand up to his mouth and said: 'Don't mind my wife. She is not feeling well today.'

He set out three glasses and poured the drinks. We held the glasses up and paused while Rasumoff gave the toast, 'No mischief.' We nodded our heads and drank.

'I'll tell you something,' Rasumoff whispered to me.

I leaned over closer to him. 'The stuff you haul will be in bottles.'

'I had an idea it wasn't beans,' I said.

'Have a cigarette,' he offered.

'I'd rather smoke my pipe,' Karlos said.

'How do you like the vodka?'

'It is good.'

'The man who makes it is a friend of mine.'

'Does he live near by?' I wanted to see if Karlos was connected with the deal.

'I'll show you when we make the first trip.'

'I was trying to get an idea as to the length of the haul.'

'You can do it in half a night. If it wasn't for my wife I would keep on doing it myself,' Rasumoff said.

'It is night driving?'

'Yes.'

'What would happen if I get caught?'

'You would go to jail.'

'Don't worry about it,' Karlos told me. 'He's been doing it for years.'

'Why are you stopping now?' I asked Rasumoff.

'My wife wants me to.'

It didn't seem to be a very good reason, but I let it go.

'Are you satisfied with the deal?' Rasumoff asked.

'Yes.'

We shook hands and stood up. Karlos put his hand on my shoulder.

'I wouldn't let you do this if I thought you couldn't handle it,' he said.

'I appreciate it,' I answered.

'Well, I've got to get started,' Rasumoff announced. We went back into the shop.

'When will you be back?' Rasumoff's wife asked. She had a nice-looking face, but you could tell that there was something inside of her that was bitter.

Rasumoff paused at the door. 'Tonight,' he replied.

When we came up to the wagon Rasumoff said, 'I'll see you tomorrow.'

'I'll be here.'

He climbed up into the seat and we watched him drive out through the entrance.

'Come on inside,' Karlos invited.

We sat down at one of the tables near the stove and Karlos took out his pipe again. I could hear Sonia and Emma working together in the kitchen.

'You don't have to worry,' Karlos said. He was stuffing tobacco into his pipe. 'The danger of getting caught is slight. He didn't give you the right reason why he is stopping driving.'

'Why is he stopping?'

'His wife does not stay at home when he is away overnight.'

'That's too bad,' I said.

'She has got him half crazy.'

'What is he going to do?'

'He'll probably kill someone pretty soon. But that's not what I want to talk to you about,' Karlos went on. 'I always let other people's business alone. What I wanted to say is this: I shouldn't have let you take the

job if it had been too dangerous. I am just trying to help you along.'

I looked around. Sonia was still in the kitchen. Karlos took a match out of his vest-pocket to light his pipe.

'I have something to tell you,' I stated.

Karlos struck the match under the table and spread the flame slowly over the bowl full of tobacco. It grew red as he sucked out great clouds of smoke. He blew the match out, and then raised his eyes up and looked squarely at me.

'I told you a lie last night. Sonia is not my sister.'

Karlos nodded his head. 'I could tell that,' he said.

'Sonia is a good girl,' I declared.

'I know how to judge people,' Karlos answered.

'We haven't had time to get married yet.'

'That's what was bothering me,' Karlos admitted. He held his pipe in his mouth a minute. 'Did her people let her go, or did you run away?'

'We ran away,' I said, and then I told him how it had been, from the time I first saw her till the night we left the house together. He let me tell him all of it without an interruption. 'I have protected her through it all,' I concluded, 'and she is still a virgin.'

Karlos got up and scratched his head.

'If you don't want us to stay here any longer ——' I was saying, but he stopped me with a movement of his hand.

'You don't have to do that,' he answered. 'The thing we have got to do now is get you two married.'

I will make the arrangements for tomorrow afternoon. That is about as soon as it can be done.

'But I haven't any money.'

'Leave it all to me. You can pay me later.'

Sonia came out of the kitchen just then and Karlos motioned for her to come over.

'Do I have to tell her the good news myself?' he asked.

'Karlos is going to make the arrangements for us to get married tomorrow afternoon,' I said.

Sonia began to blush.

'Can I kiss the bride?' Karlos laughed. He began to hum a few notes of the *Polka Mazurka*.

Emma came in. 'I heard that,' she said, coming up and putting her big arms around Sonia. 'Now both of you get out of here.'

During the rest of the day I helped Karlos with the work around the stable yard, cleaning out the stalls, spreading fresh straw around, and carting the horse manure out to the place where it was kept in the alley. Sonia was busy all day helping Emma. At noon I told her that Karlos had helped me get a job driving Rasumoff's wagon, but I didn't tell her about the risk that went with it.

SIEDMNAŚCIE

THAT NIGHT SONIA SLEPT WITH EMMA AND I slept in the attic room by myself. I woke up early. When I went down I saw that Sonia was already at work helping Emma. There were quite a few people sitting at the tables eating. Through the window I saw out into the yard. A few of Karlos' guests were hitching up their teams and getting ready to leave, their horses shaking their heads and snorting plumes of steam. I went outside. Karlos and Rasumoff were talking together. Rasumoff had his foot on the front wheel, ready to climb up into his wagon. He turned around. When he saw me he threw up his head and laughed.

'So you are going to get married this afternoon.'

They were grinning at each other.

'Yes,' I said. I didn't want to talk about it. I didn't feel that I ought to. It was a private matter. I could see by their grins that they wanted to joke me a little.

'I tried to keep him from it, but he wouldn't listen,' Karlos declared.

'Why don't you work on him a little more?'

'You can't tell a Pole anything,' Karlos rejoined.

'You mean the kind made of wood?'

They both laughed. I couldn't see anything very funny.

'There's not much difference when they've got that look in their eyes,' Karlos said.

Rasumoff climbed up on the seat. They shook their heads sadly at each other. Rasumoff shook out his reins and the wagon moved off.

'I'll be back in time to have supper with you,' he called back.

We waved him good-bye.

'Have you had breakfast?' Karlos asked.

'Not yet.'

'Well, let's go eat. I want you to look after things while I go into town.'

After breakfast I worked out in the yard, but I couldn't keep my attention on what I was doing. I was going around in a sort of daze, trying to clean the stables that I had already cleaned, picking up the wheelbarrow and pushing it off without anything in it. I would suddenly find myself standing still and looking off at nothing, and I wouldn't know how long I had been standing there. I would start to do something, and before I could do it I would forget what it was that I was going to do, and I would stand there feeling foolish trying to think of what it was.

Karlos was away most of the day. When he came back he had a large goose already dressed. He handed it over to Emma. There was a jolly look on his face. Sonia came in from the kitchen.

'And how have my two little love birds been getting along?' Karlos asked Emma.

'I haven't heard them make a twitter all day,' she returned. 'They have eyes like sheep, but they have the tongue of a shepherd.'

Sonia ran back into the kitchen. Karlos punched me in the ribs. I tried to laugh, but it was just a short funny sound.

'Cheer up,' he said. 'The world is not coming to an end.'

I couldn't think of anything to say. I wanted to say something, but I couldn't think of anything that wasn't too important to talk about. The words couldn't say how important it really was.

'Come on up to my room. I want to show you something,' Karlos told me.

I followed him up the stairs to his room. The thought of getting married was like a strange bright wheel whirling around inside of me. I felt light-headed and bursting with happiness, but I couldn't say anything about it because I didn't know how. I was full of action, but I couldn't think of anything to do.

When we were in Karlos' room he took something out of his pocket and handed it to me. It was a ring. I held it in my hand and felt of it. When I tried to say something Karlos waved it aside with a movement of his hand.

'You stay here,' he commanded. 'My razor is there on the dresser by the pitcher of water. The priest will be here in about an hour.'

I nodded my head and he went back downstairs.

Emma told me to go on up to the room and get myself ready to get married. When she came up a little later I had just finished combing my hair and was putting the *busteczka* back on. She stepped up and stopped me.

'Don't wear that,' she said.

'I should have something on my head.'

'Your hair is enough. It looks better than anything you could put on it.'

I sat down on the bed and she sat beside me.

'Karlos said to tell you the priest is on the way.'

'This is not the way we get married in Poland,' I said.

'There is always a great crowd, and music, and everyone has a fine time eating and dancing. And all your relatives are there.' I had to look away to hide my eyes from Emma. I had thought of my father and mother. 'No one ever gets married in Poland without the presence of their parents,' I said.

'You must not feel so badly about it,' Emma was saying.

'I am happy,' I said, 'but I feel sad.'

'We will have a fine supper tonight!'

'Tonight,' I said. 'Emma, have you ever been married?'

'Yes.'

'Where is your husband?'

'He is dead. He died in the Great War.'

'I am sorry for you, Emma.'

'He was a fine strong man,' Emma said. There was a lovely expression on her face.

'Emma, I have a strange feeling.'

'I know what you mean.'

'Emma, how did you feel when you first got married?'

'It was the time of the most happiness. At first you will be afraid, and then you will be brave. He will be gentle, and that will make you love him forever.'

'I *am* frightened. But not of *him*. I am just afraid. It is so strange and new. It seems as though it would be easier if we just kept on as we were. The priest will not make it any more sacred for me. We have already made it sacred between us. We did it by just looking at each other.'

'If it were not for other people it would be all right. But it is a custom. Your mother did it. Everyone has to do it.'

'What makes you love someone so much, Emma? What makes it so important? Why do I feel that way about him, Emma?'

'My mother told me it was because your hearts had shaken hands.'

'Emma.'

'Yes?'

'I am not afraid any more. I am not afraid of any thing.'

She looked at me and put her hand on my shoulder. We sat there together without saying anything. I felt as though I were standing up on a high cliff, ready to fling out into a bright green valley. The sun was shining

down on the red roofs of a village of beautiful white houses. I felt as if I could fly down into the village and live there forever. Emma was smiling at me.

I wasn't very calm.

After I had shaved I sat down in a chair. I took the ring out of my pocket and looked at it. And then I tried to think which finger I was supposed to put it on. There was one certain finger. I had watched my oldest brother get married, but I couldn't remember just how he had put the ring on.

I was too excited to sit still. I got up from the chair and walked around the room, picking up things and looking at them, a brush, a pocketknife, a book. The words in the book didn't seem to make sense. Each page was just lines of words. I put it down and went over to the window. Evening was approaching. The sky was beginning to lose its color. People were going along the sidewalk at a slow and unexcited pace. Karlos came in.

'The priest will be up here in a minute,' he stated.

'Are we going to get married right now, up here?'

'We can do it privately up here.'

I was beginning to get into a strain. My throat was dry. It seemed as if the room had got hot and stuffy all of a sudden.

'What are you sweating about?' Karlos asked.

'I need a drink of water.'

'A drink of water at a time like this!'

'I must have a fever.'

'The priest will fix you up.'

'K-Karlos.'

'What is it?'

'Which finger and which hand?'

'Which what? Oh, it's the middle finger of the right hand.'

'Thanks,' I breathed.

Karlos turned his head. 'Here they come.'

The priest came in. Sonia and Emma were behind him. He came up and Karlos introduced us. He was a small red-faced, broad-built fellow, about the same age as Karlos.

While I had been shaking the priest's hand Sonia had come over and was standing beside me. Karlos came up and stood by me on the right side. Emma was standing on the other side of Sonia, with the priest out in front of all of us. I hadn't understood anything the priest had said to me because he had been speaking Lithuanian. I didn't even catch his name.

All of a sudden he began saying something in a slow, solemn voice. When I looked at Karlos to ask what he was saying he nudged me in the ribs with his elbow and kept on looking straight ahead. The priest stopped talking. He looked at Emma and Karlos. They nodded their heads, and then he took a book out of his pocket. After he had found the page he began to read aloud. I didn't know exactly what was happening, but I felt the importance of his words by the way he was speaking them.

When he came to the end he lifted his eyes and spoke to us. Emma and Karlos whispered for us to say 'yes.'

It was all I could do to get the word out of my throat. Then the priest asked me something. I didn't know what it was, but Karlos prodded me in the ribs.

'The ring,' he whispered. 'Put the ring on her finger.'

I reached into my pocket and took it out. I was looking straight ahead at the priest, and when I reached down to get Sonia's hand I couldn't find it. Finally I bent my head down to look and saw that she was holding her hand up in front of me. My hands were shaking and so was hers, and I couldn't seem to find the right finger. The only finger I could find was her thumb. I was hopelessly lost among her fingers. It seemed as though there were eight or ten of them, and they were all in the way. Finally the priest reached over and guided the ring onto the right finger for me. It was a great relief. I said, 'Thanks,' but the word didn't come out as I meant it to; it was a sort of high squeak.

The silent effort I had been going through was making the sweat come out on my face. The priest had smiled at me when I thanked him, and then his face became serious again as he lifted his hands over our heads and pronounced a few more Lithuanian words in a slow, quiet voice.

Karlos was the first to move. He turned me around and shook my hand.

'Are we married now?' I asked.

'There's no doubt about it,' he declared.

The priest was shaking my hand and Emma was holding a handkerchief up to her nose and laughing and hugging Sonia all at the same time.

OŚMNAŚCIE

I STRUCK A MATCH AND LIT THE LAMP.

'I didn't understand a thing the priest said,' Sonia was saying.

We had just come up to the room after having eaten the goose supper with Karlos and Emma, and Rasumoff and his wife. Sonia sat down on the bed and I sat on the chair.

'I'll get Karlos to get us a translation of the ceremony,' I replied.

'I wonder why he didn't get a Polish priest.'

'Maybe he didn't know any.'

It was time to go to bed, but I didn't want to say it. I didn't want to seem to be in a hurry about it. I was keeping my eyes away from her face and talking in a disinterested sort of way, but I could feel a peculiar tenseness in the room, and I knew that we were both waiting for the tenseness to go away.

'Karlos and Rasumoff have been good to us,' I said.

'Why do you have to drive the wagon at night?' Sonia asked.

I had already figured out an answer for that one. 'Rasumoff drives it during the day.'

'Will he have two teams?'

I hadn't figured on that one. 'I guess so.'

'They are peculiar people. They hardly said a word all the time we were eating.'

'Maybe they weren't feeling well.'

'They left early.'

'I noticed that,' I replied.

Sonia was twisting the ring around on her finger. She slid it off and looked at it.

'It's a little large,' she remarked.

'Karlos got it for us,' I said. 'We can have it made smaller.'

I started to tell her that I was going to pay him for the ring as soon as I made the money, but I knew that she already knew I would do that, so I didn't mention it. I was about to ask her if the room was cold enough for me to build a fire in the stove, when she began to smile at me.

'You were trying to put the ring on my thumb,' she said.

I laughed. 'The light was bad,' I explained.

I mashed out the cigarette I had been smoking. Sonia stretched her arms up and around, and began to yawn.

'All that food is making me sleepy,' she declared, and then she began to blush when she thought of what she had said. We didn't have to sleep separately any more. The idea of sleeping together had made me feel a little uncertain. I didn't know just how two married people arranged it. I stood up and looked around the room, and when I looked back at Sonia she was standing up

looking at me. Then we were holding each other tightly.

'I will turn out the lamp,' I said.

We lay close together in the darkness of the room. I could not speak. I knew that she was not afraid. Her breath was hot on my face and her arms were warm and tight around me. I felt the heat of her. I pressed her to me and she clung to me and pressed her body closer. Her breath came hot and fast. Our lips were crushed together. I moved myself until I was in the right position and she was writhing and twisting and pulling me closer as I found the hot yielding pleasure of it. The soft warm feeling. The gentle movement of soft flesh yielding and pushing up. The motion of it. The quick restless rhythm of inward feeling. The panting ebb and flow of vibrating pleasure, smoothing out with pleasure. The hot smothering breath and tight-fitting embrace and warm flow of feeling. The tight urgent grasp, squeezing closer to the warm softness. Arms around her, increasing the pressure. The slow increase, gasping and panting. The soft squeezing pressure and the delicate miraculous floating away into completeness.

DZWIĘZIETNAŚCIE

THE NEXT DAY, AFTER I HAD HELPED KARLOS with the work around the inn, I sat down to write a letter to Felix, my oldest brother living in Switzerland. The main thing I asked him to do was send me some money. I wrote a letter home, but I didn't ask them for any money because I didn't know how the war had made things there. I didn't even know whether they were alive or not. When Sonia had finished her letter home we went down and borrowed money for postage from Karlos. He gave us the directions to the post office.

Karlos' inn was on Little Vilna Street. We had to go across town a few blocks, and then we turned down a long straight street that was lined on both sides with tall big-limbed trees. It was a boulevard. Trees, flowers, and shrubbery were planted out in the center, and there were benches to sit on. It was almost like a park. Standing back from the sidewalk were large brick houses with long grassy front yards protected by iron fences, or low brick walls. Above the tops of the trees on the other side of the street we saw the tops of large gray buildings. Now and then, on the side we were on, we

passed the wide glassed-in windows of fashionable shops displaying clothing, jewelry, photographs, and furniture. We would stop for a while and look at the things for sale in the windows.

It was nice to have time to do something besides walk along a deserted road and keep out of sight as much as possible, and always have the thought in mind of stealing or begging something to eat, or having to hunt a place to sleep in that wasn't too conspicuous. It was a nice feeling. It was the way you feel when you get up after a good night's rest and sit down to a good breakfast and drink the last cup of coffee while you smoke a cigarette, and all this with the thought in mind that after you smoke the cigarette you can get up and go out and do something that isn't begging or stealing, or anything like that. We walked along feeling fine. People were going to and fro, some of them walking along the sidewalk and others riding in *droszkas* out on the busy cobblestoned street.

Just before we went into the depot, where the post office was located, I took out the letter I had written home and tore it up. I had almost forgotten that the authorities in Kalish would want to know why I was not with the army in Poland. I didn't want to have things messed up again by a suspicious postman.

'Why did you do that?' Sonia asked.

'I shall have to find some other way to let my folks know,' I told her, and then she understood.

'Maybe I ought not to send mine either.'

'I guess we had better wait awhile longer,' I said.

I could see it in her eyes how much she wanted to send the letter. Her folks were back in Poland, and worried. She wanted to let them know that she was all right, that it wasn't what they might think it was. It would make her happy if she could tell them this.

'But go ahead and send it,' I added. 'You can send yours. It won't make any difference.'

Her face lit up. We started through the door.

'No, wait,' Sonia said. She put her hand on my arm. 'We can send it later on.' She was biting her lip and looking down.

'It'll be all right,' I assured her. 'I think it will be all right to send it.'

'Do you?'

'Sure.'

We were taking a chance, but I had to let her do it. I knew the importance of the letter to her. It would make her feel all right.

'Just scratch out the return address,' I said.

After we left the depot I had a feeling that we had been too careless about the letter to Sonia's folks, but I didn't say anything about it. Sonia's face was full of the beauty of her happiness, and she hung closely to my arm as we walked together back along the street. There was something about the way she was holding my arm that made me feel wonderful. Her face, as she looked up at me, seemed to have a transparent pearl-like quality. There was something in her eyes that was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I hardly knew that I was walking. We would laugh at each other without having

said anything to laugh about, and when we would say something it was always so important that we would stand still and speak in a whisper. But we were talking more with our eyes than with our lips. Everything we saw was wonderful, a bird in swift up-sweeping flight, a high white floating cloud, a flower swaying in the soft warm breeze.

‘I just like to look!’ Sonia exclaimed.

‘There is so much freedom in it,’ I said.

‘When I look at something it makes me own part of it,’ she explained.

‘Well, keep your eyes on me,’ I returned.

She smiled at me. When she squeezed my hand I had to lean over and kiss her quickly on the cheek.

DWADZIEŚCIA

I LIT MY CIGARETTE AND RASUMOFF HANDED me the lines while he lit his. We were well out of town and had just turned off from the main road into a narrow dirt road that was winding through a stretch of flat sandy farm land. The windows of the houses we passed were all dark. It was a relief to get off the cobblestones. The wheels of the wagon made a soft grinding sound as they rolled along in the two shallow ruts in the darkness. It was pitch dark; no moon, no stars. But our eyes had got used to it and we could see the haystacks and houses and barns without any trouble.

Now and then one of the front wheels would grate and skid on a stone. The reins were almost useless so far as guiding the team was concerned, because the road was so easy to follow, and anyway the horses seemed to know where each rise or turn in the road was before I did. But I was sitting there on the seat beside Rasumoff with the lines slack in my hands, feeling the work the horses were doing and feeling that I had something to do with it by just holding the lines in my hands and looking ahead at the road.

'Have you always driven out here alone?' I asked

Rasumoff. He had not spoken since we had met at the stable yard. Now he grunted something that sounded like 'Yes,' and took the lines back. I wanted to talk because I wanted to find out a little something about the job if I was going to handle it alone the next time.

Just before we had got into the wagon Rasumoff had handed me a pistol and said, 'Be careful with this. It's loaded.' I had stuck it under my belt under my shirt and we had climbed up into the wagon and started off.

'Are you carrying one too?' I had asked him.

'No,' he had said. 'You won't have to use it.'

I had let it go at that, but now that I had thought it over I couldn't see why I was carrying a gun if he thought I wouldn't have to use it. And now I said:

'Listen, Rasumoff, you are paying me to work for you, all right, but I want to know what kind of work I am doing. If I'm taking a risk I want to know what it is. I want to know who I have to shoot at if I have to shoot.'

Rasumoff looked at me. 'It's mainly for persuasion. The fellow we deliver the stuff to is one of those cheap bastards. When he gets the stuff in his hands somehow he wants to cut the price a little. You have to be a little firm with him, that's all.'

'I just wanted to know,' I explained. 'I thought I might have to use it on a government officer. I just wanted to know,' I repeated.

Rasumoff laughed. 'They're the ones we sell it to,' he said.

'How do you get by with that? All they have to do is arrest you and take the stuff free.'

He nodded his head. 'They could if we had it with us. But that's not how I work it. I go and collect, and *then* I tell them where the wagon is. But don't worry about it. It's all cut and dried.'

'But what if they left it in the wagon and got you when you came back to it?'

'I always leave the wagon where I can watch them take it. Besides, when I get back to it I've already got the money for the stuff, haven't I?'

I hadn't figured Rasumoff was as smart as that. I had thought that he was just a bootlegger with a small private trade.

'Well, there's just one more thing,' I said. 'Why don't these fellows do the hauling themselves and save what they pay you?'

'They're too lazy. They want to sleep at home at night.'

'If they are at home asleep, how can they be up to pay you off and take the stuff?'

'They do it through a representative. He's the fellow we have to be persuasive with. The more he cuts down, the more he makes, you see.'

'I see,' I said.

Up ahead I saw a light in a farmhouse. It was out in a field ahead of us on the right.

'Do you think you can handle it when I'm not with you?' Rasumoff asked.

'*Nechevo*,' I answered. 'Where is the risk? It is nothing.'

Rasumoff laughed. He slapped me on the shoulder and

(TWO ALONE)

laughed out loud. '*Nechevo*,' he said. 'Wait till I tell Karlos this. Ha, ha! You will do.'

The front wheels grated against a rock. Rasumoff shook out the lines and began to whistle a tune softly to himself. The wagon began to roll a little faster, going downgrade.

THE END

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